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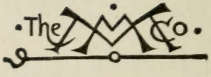
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THE MASTERS

OF

ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

STEPHEN GWYNN

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PREFACE

SOME explanation is needed to account for the appearance of this book, in a period which sets so much value on specialised study.

The writer would justify it by the view, first, that in English literature there are certain authors who may be classed as obligatory — concerning whom total ignorance is a defect at least to be concealed; and secondly, that the ordinary reader has neither the time nor inclination to study all these authors at first hand. An attempt has therefore been made to put together a survey of the literature which should concern itself only with such authors as can be deemed in this manner essential; with the hope that it might usefully supplement the necessarily partial knowledge possessed by young or busy people, and perhaps serve as a guide to those who wish to extend their reading.

The main criterion which has regulated the selection of names is public fame. Without wishing to assert that Crabbe is a better poet than Campion, or Gray than Webster, it may be stated emphatically that no educated man in the English-speaking world can afford to profess entire ignor-

ance of the former in each pair, and therefore to them, and not to the latter, space is devoted. Beyond this, has been the thought of contemporary taste. No book has been dwelt on at length which the writer would not recommend as agreeable reading to any lover of literature. If any concession has been made to public fame in this respect, it has been in the case of authors such as Thomson, who are specially significant in the development of the literature.

For in such a survey as this the writer has to conduct the reader through what is in one aspect a continuous history of events that cannot be viewed in isolation: and, for example, the extent of Pope's success is ill understood unless we realise that at the same epoch Thomson achieved a sudden popularity. It is not too much to say that an educated man who knows what manner of poetry Thomson wrote, and — not less important — in what age he wrote it, may well be excused for not knowing more. This kind of information it is the book's first aim to provide; while it refuses steadfastly to tell the reader anything at all about such excellent but unessential persons as Akenside or Rogers.

One may, however, deprecate the inference that the writer recommends the study of a hand-book in preference to that of the authors themselves. Whatever is written in these pages by way of criticism or biographical narrative is designed to awaken interest, and to send the reader to those

masters of the literature of whom he has learnt enough to wish to learn more. Quotation, in many cases copious, illustrates the sketch of each author.

The book being addressed to young readers, or to those who have made no exhaustive study of literature, presumes the need for a good deal of explanation. But it also presumes that certain authors will be familiar to everyone; for instance, in the chapter on Shakespeare no descriptive account of any play is attempted, and quotation is employed only to illustrate critical observations. On the other hand, with authors like Pope, perhaps oftener named than read, an attempt has been made to give some adequate specimen of their work. The literature of the Victorian period, as more familiar, has been dismissed with very summary treatment. Generally speaking, the more quotable an author, the more he has been quoted; and poetry therefore much more than prose. Also, since it was necessary in all ways to limit the task, those authors have been somewhat neglected who owe their importance to matter rather than to manner; who, whether as divines, historians, and philosophers, have a place in science no less than in pure literature.

To this explanation must be added an apology. How imperfect is the execution of this text-book, no one knows better than its author. But a book of the kind seemed to be needed, and his attempt to carry out what he conceived has been at least

conscientiously made, with a true desire to quicken that love for the literature of the English tongue which is to them who feel it so deep a source of pleasure and advantage.

Since in a brief historical summary of this kind, the entire structure rests on other men's work, acknowledgments cannot be adequately made. Special indebtedness has generally been made clear in passing — and notably, among living critics, to Professor Raleigh. But it will appear sufficiently that great reliance has been placed on the "English Men of Letters" series; and in that series two should be particularised. The late Mark Pattison's *Milton* is a superb example of biographical criticism; while the intelligent student who wishes to learn what can be taught about the art of poetry will find perhaps more instruction in Mr. Colvin's monograph on Keats than in any other English book.

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THE MASTERS
OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

CHAUCER

In the history of most literatures, excellence is found to develop in poetry sooner than in prose, and the first great name in English literature is that of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer.

The story of his life is little known. Born in or about 1340, he must have grown up among the triumphs of Creçy and Poitiers. His father was a wine merchant who had close relations with the king (it must be remembered that Chaucer's London was smaller than Bath is to-day). Geoffrey Chaucer was placed at Court, and we find documentary proof that in 1357 he was attached to the household of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, wife to Edward III.'s second son. He saw service in France, was captured and ransomed by Edward. By 1367 he was a valet of the king's own chamber, and in the next year was promoted Esquire. In 1372 he was sent on an embassy to Pisa and Genoa to treat concerning the settlement of Genoese traders in England — and this mission, we shall see, was of immense importance in his literary life. Seemingly in reward for his services, he was appointed Comptroller of the Customs in the port of London. He was sent abroad on

diplomatic missions, to Flanders in 1377, and in 1378 again to Italy. He had married, probably before 1366, a lady in waiting of the Countess of Ulster's household, who as well as himself enjoyed a pension. It is probable that she was sister to the second wife of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster; it is, at all events, certain that John of Gaunt was Chaucer's special patron at Court, and perhaps the first of his original poems was *The Dethe of Blaunche the Duchesse*, an allegorical lament for John of Gaunt's first wife, who died in 1369.

It will be seen that Chaucer lived a much occupied life. First a courtier, with some experience of soldiering; then a diplomat rewarded with a post in what we should now call the Civil Service, to which was added in 1382 the Comptrollership of the Petty Customs. Up to 1386, therefore, he was a busy and a successful man. But in that year John of Gaunt's influence at the Court of the young king Richard II. waned, and Chaucer, falling with his patron, was dismissed from his offices. It was probably in April of this year that he made his pilgrimage to Canterbury. For the rest of his life, though he was given certain small employments, and in 1394 a small pension, he was a courtier in disgrace and in distress for money. He was a widower also, though we have no reason to believe that he specially regretted his wife. The latest of his compositions which can be dated with certainty is, *The Compleynt of Chaucer to his Purse*, addressed to Henry IV. after his usurpation of the throne in 1399:

> To you, my purse, and to noon other wyght
> Compleyne I, for ye be my lady dere!
> I am so sory, now that ye been light;
> For, certès, but ye make me hevy chere,
> Me were as leef be leyd up-on my bere;
> For whiche unto your mercy thus I crye:
> Beth hevy ageyn, or ellês mot I dye!

Two more stanzas maintain the same rhymes and the Envoy concludes:

> O Conquerour of Brutès Albioun!
> Which that by lyne and free eleccioun
> Ben verray king, this song to you I sende;
> And ye that mowen al myn harm amende,
> Have mynde up-on my supplicacioun!

The petition succeeded; Chaucer's pension of 20 marks (say, £200 nowadays) was doubled, and the end of his life was probably free from discomfort. He died in 1400 at his house in Westminster. The tombstone which marks his grave in Westminster Abbey was erected in 1556.

Although the first of England's great writers, Chaucer is no primitive poet; there is no analogy between his work and that of the Homeric poems, the supreme example of a well-marked literary class. Primitive literature there is in English, but the English sagas compare ill with the German, the Icelandic, or the Celtic; and in the ballad, a later but still primitive form, Scotland and not England produced simple poetry of the highest kind. Chaucer stands at a beginning, but it is a beginning where two distinct and developed elements unite to produce a third. In his verse we find at last the English language assimilating its large additions from the Norman French vocabulary, and the English genius adopting successfully the subjects and the forms of art provided by the Romance culture in the literatures of France and Italy.

It is important to realise that when Chaucer was born, nearly three centuries after the Norman conquest, English was neither the language of government nor of learning. The conquerors had indeed adopted the speech of the conquered, modified by the gradual shedding of many inflections, and enriched or altered by the addition of many new

words. But it was still even less like the English of to-day than it appears to the eye, for the verse of Chaucer shows us that in many cases words which are now monosyllables — for instance 'dogs' and 'hogs' — were then dissyllabic, 'doggés,' 'hoggés'; and similarly that such a rhyme as 'sought,' 'bethought' is in reality double, 'soghté,' 'bethoghté.' Thus, when handling the language for metrical purposes, Chaucer had in these weak-ending syllables at once a resource and a complication to deal with which did not exist for the English of a later day. Grammatical and philological reasons have been given by students (Ten Brink and others) for Chaucer's metrical use of this weak ending: it is sufficient to say here that when the 'e' final is marked, it must be given the value of a metric syllable, though very slightly indicated in reading, like the *e muet* in French. This principle, it must be remembered, would need no explanation to the readers for whom he wrote, since in Chaucer's day every educated Englishman was master of French and probably of Latin also. His contemporary, Gower, wrote three long poems, of which the first was in Anglo-Norman French, the second in Latin, and only the third in English. In the prefatory verses to this last, though it was written somewhere between 1380 and 1390, Gower still could say:

> And that for fewė men indite
> In our English, I thinkė make
> A book for King Richardēs sake.

Of these "fewė men" Chaucer had long been one. From the beginning of his career as a writer, he chose to write in English. But to a writer in English there was still another choice open. He might employ the metrical system common to all the Teutonic races, which depended not on rhyme

and syllabic measurement, but on recurring stresses helped out by alliteration. This principle, impossible for example in French, where the accent on each word is distributed, was natural to English; and while one of Chaucer's contemporaries was employing Norman French for verse, another, Langland, was composing popular poetry in the old rough form. A few lines may be quoted to illustrate this kind of verse from Dunbar, the greatest of early Scotch poets, who flourished about a century later than Chaucer, and who wrote for the most part in highly intricate measures of the Romance type.

Thus *d*rave they ower that *d*ear night, | with *d*ances full noble,
Till that the *d*ay did up *d*aw, | and *d*ew *d*ankit the flowrés;
The *m*orrow *m*ild was and *m*eek, | the *m*avis did sing,
And all re*m*ovit the *m*ist, | and the *m*ead smellit;
Silver showrés down shook, | as the sheen crystal,
And birdés shoutit in shaw, | with their shrill notés;
The golden glitter and gleam, | so gladdit their heartés,
They made a glorious glee | among the green boughés.
The soft sough of the swire | and soune of the streamés,
The sweet savour of the sward, | and singing of fowlés
Might comfórt any creature | of the kin of Adam,
And kindill again his courage | though it were cold slockened.

Langland was of the populace and wrote primarily for the populace: his "Piers Plowman" puts the bitter cry of the oppressed commons into the kind of verse most familiar to their ears. But, though, as we have seen, the older system was kept in memory and use up to Dunbar's day, yet, broadly speaking, Chaucer, and those of his contemporaries who wrote like him for the Court, fixed for centuries the principle that English poetry should follow the French methods, adopting metres which depended on rhyme and syllabic

measurement. Chaucer, however, like the great artist that he was, added to the French model some of the English characteristics. Alliteration is never essential to his metre, but he uses it constantly as an added ornament, and in this all English poets have followed him. His verses, as a rule, consist of either eight or ten syllables with a possible double ending that brings them to nine or eleven; and in this again he follows the French practice. But he sees also that the strength of English stresses allows him to slur syllables, so that his verse, though predominantly syllabic, is more accurately described as a verse of four or five stresses.

This natural evolution of English verse from syllabic measurement to stress measurement proceeded under Shakespeare and Milton, and culminated in their blank verse, which admits of infinite variations on such a simple iambic type as

Beneath the foot of Eve arose a thorn.

The point will have to be illustrated again; but it may be remarked here that the reaction under Dryden and Pope, men influenced by French canons, made English verse for a while strictly syllabic. It was succeeded in the nineteenth century by a counter-reaction, which has in many metres abandoned syllabic measurement entirely, and, retaining rhyme, has reverted to the Anglo-Saxon principle of ordered stresses. But the men who have done this — Coleridge, Shelley, Tennyson, Swinburne — have proceeded on the lines of development indicated by Chaucer. Dryden and Pope, who sought to correct what they considered his roughnesses, were in mere technical skill far the inferiors of this great beginner.

From a literary point of view, Chaucer's life

falls into three periods. In the first we see him as a translator and imitator of the French, employing the eight-syllable rhymed verse of the French romances. His principal work as translator was undoubtedly a rendering of the famous *Roman de la Rose*, the most popular literary production of the age whose most characteristic institutions were the Courts of Love. We cannot be certain whether the fourteenth-century version of the poem which we possess is Chaucer's; but we know that he made one. Now, the *Roman de la Rose* shows at once the mediaeval cult of love and the reaction from it. Guillaume de Lorris, who began the poem, wrote some 5000 lines describing in an allegory the lover's pursuit of the symbolic Rose, and the foes and friends, such as Danger, Bel Accueil, and Jealousy, whom he encountered in the symbolic Garden. Forty years later a man called Jean de Meung took up the poem, and added a much longer sequel, which tells how and by what aid the lover is at last enabled to cull the rose. But into this part there enters much satiric description of mediaeval life and not a little cynicism. What began with the worship of Love ends (from the point of view of Love's Courts) in blasphemous parody. Chaucer, it has been said, passes from the standpoint of Guillaume de Lorris to that of Jean de Meung: from allegory to realism, from devotion to mockery.

When he went to Italy in 1372 he came into the midmost of the Renaissance. Dante had written and his fame had been established, Petrarch and Boccaccio were living. These men did not write about embodied qualities pursuing emblematic flowers in allegoric gardens; they wrote about men and women — though, as in Dante, men and women might be used to typify vices or perfections. All Chaucer's humanism answered to

the challenge; and he threw himself into the work of translating and adapting stories which he found in the Italian dress. He paid homage again and again to Dante, whose *Commedia* he imitated in his unfinished vision of the *Hous of Fame*; he paid homage to Petrarch, and when the Clerk in a prologue to the tale of patient Griselda says that he learnt it in Padua of a learned clerk, "Francis Petrarch the laureate poëte," Chaucer is probably assigning to the clerk what was his own good fortune. But the tale is taken by Chaucer only from Petrarch's Latin version of Boccaccio's Italian; and this, like *Troilus and Criseyde*, the tale of Palamon and Arcite, and more besides, is really a plundering from the rich storehouse which Boccaccio's work has afforded to greater writers than himself.

What Chaucer borrowed he made his own; for when he translated he enriched, and when he borrowed a scheme or story he amplified and altered. Thus, in the *Troilus and Criseyde* only some 2500 lines of 8500 can be traced to Boccaccio's *Filostrato*. But the fact remains that up to a certain period Chaucer was at best a fine derivative poet. He was certainly over forty before his full originality displayed itself in the great scheme of the *Canterbury Tales*. We can see him in the *Hous of Fame* and the *Legende of Good Women* (both left unfinished) feeling his way to some large structure; and when he abandoned the latter design, meant to consist of a prologue and twenty stories of women who were true to love, he abandoned it in favour of a scheme which should admit the display of his most characteristic quality, as yet excluded from his work — his rich English humour.

The scheme at last conceived was in fact an

expedient that enabled him to employ several long independent poems previously completed, which he now proposed to set like decorative panels in a great sculptured chest. We may be sure that the *Lyf of Seinte Cecile* (the Second Nun's Tale), the *Story of Grisilde* (the Clerk's Tale), the *Story of Custance* (the Man of Law's Tale), and the Monk's Tale, which contains twelve 'Tragedies' of Great Men and Women, were completed before he began upon his more characteristic work. And a comparison between any of these and the *Prologue* is the simplest way to realise how great is the difference between Chaucer the creative artist and Chaucer the adapter of other men's writing. Yet even in these, and especially in the *Clerk's Tale*, we recognise a great narrative poet. The excellences, however, of this part of the *Canterbury Tales* are surpassed in the *Troilus and Cressida*, where Chaucer probably attained his highest pitch in the beauty of sustained and purely poetic narrative.

The fact that Chaucer was well on in middle life before he wrote a poetry that was entirely his own, gives a special stamp to his work. He is among the least lyrical of all English poets ; and he writes always as the observer rather than as the man impelled to utter his inmost feelings. Even the thoughts which he expresses are the common thoughts of men who know the world, and in this as in other matters he resembles the other courtier poet, Horace. The framework of the *Canterbury Tales* recalls the journey to Brundusium.

For the poem, as a whole, describes the gathering and the progress of a company of pilgrims, gentle and simple, who journeyed together from London to Canterbury, and recites in verse the stories, comic and tragic, by which they beguiled

the way. Whether an actual pilgrimage suggested to Chaucer the scheme of the poem, or *vice versa*, we cannot say ; but we may be sure that somewhere about 1386 Chaucer made the journey, saw the pilgrims gather at the Tabard Inn in Southwark one evening in April, and set out with them next morning under the guidance of Mr. Harry Bailey, the host of the Tabard, who was a historical person and a member of Parliament. Moreover, though Chaucer probably got no more than a suggestion, and added types and incidents, we may believe that some such motley gathering did actually shorten the road by telling stories each in his turn. The uncompromising realism of his method in this framework leads one to infer a basis of fact.

At all events, the poem — which encloses in itself a whole array of independent poems, comic and tragic — begins by telling how in April, when the sap stirs, folk are visited with a longing to go on pilgrimages. And these first lines curiously typify the whole blending of new and old, which makes the poem what it is. For the description of spring and the singing of birds which opens is conventional and obligatory by the usages of mediaeval poetry, but like all such descriptions in Chaucer it is pervaded by a freshness of feeling that gives life to the hackneyed form : and certainly the observation that the desire for travel wakens with the stirring of buds is entirely unconventional and individual. Then we go straight to the description of the company, extending over a matter of seven hundred lines, in which, by Chaucer's art, the whole pageant of mediaeval England passes before our very eyes. Here are two of the portraits :

> With hym ther was his sone, a yong Squier,
> A lovyere and a lusty bacheler,
> With lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse.
> Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse.

Of his statúre he was of even lengthe,
And wonderly delyvere, and greet of strengthe;
And he hadde been somtyme in chyvachie,
In Flaundres, in Artoys and Pycardie,
And born hym weel, as of so litel space,
In hope to stonden in his lady grace.
Embrouded was he, as it were a meede
Al ful of freshė flourės, whyte and reede;
Syngynge he was, or floytynge all the day;
He was as fressh as is the monthe of May.
Short was his gowne, with slevės longe and wyde;
Well koude he sitte on hors and fairė ryde;
He koudė songės make and wel endite,
Juste and eek daunce and weel purtreye and write.
So hoote he lovėde that by nightertale
He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale.
Curteis he was, lowely and servysáble,
And carf biforn his fader at the table.

* * * * *

The Millere was a stout carle for the nones,
Ful byg he was of brawn, and eek of bones;
That provèd wel, for over al, ther he cam,
At wrastlynge he wolde have awey the ram,
He was short sholdred, brood, a thikkė knarre,
Ther nas no dore that he nolde heve of harre,
Or breke it at a rennyng with his heed.
His berd, as any sowe or foxe, was reed,
And therto brood, as though it were a spade.

* * * * *

His nosėtherlės blakė were and wyde;
A swerd and a bokeler bar he by his syde;
His mouth as wyde was as a greet forneys,
He was a janglere, and a goliardeys,
And that was moost of synne and harlotriës.
Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thriës,
And yet he hadde a thombe of gold, pardee,
A whit cote and a blew hood werėd he.
A baggėpipe wel koude he blowe and sowne,
And therwithal he broghte us out of towne.

Now it is obvious that these two personages will not tell the same sort of story, and while the *Squire's Tale*, which Chaucer "left half-told," is a high romance of marvels and enchantments, the

Miller's is a gross ribaldry. And since the company consists of thirty-four in all, each type in it no less distinctly sketched than those quoted, and since on the whole Chaucer maintains a consonance between the narrator and the tale, it follows that there is a great variety of narrative : the gentlefolk on the whole inclining to romantic tragedy, the commoners to lewd jesting. Whatever tendency there may be among such folk as the man of law to gloomy themes is counteracted by the jolly host, who interposes constantly, sometimes to keep the peace, but always in the interest of jollity. It is this framework that keeps the *Canterbury Tales* imperishable, for in it Chaucer is entirely himself, unhampered by any convention : and its realism makes an admirable foil to the quaint and ceremonious stiffness of the mediaeval romance which figures so largely in the tales.

Take for example the *Knight's Tale*, which is the story of two young Theban warriors captured by Theseus, and imprisoned in Athens. But Theseus is a knight with mail and lance, and their dungeon is a mediaeval tower looking on to a mediaeval pleasance. In this pleasance one of the friends, Palamon, espies from his prison a lady wandering, and suddenly cries out under the dart of love. Arcite, at his complaint, looks out to see the cause of such woe, and he too cries out :

> The fresshė beautee sleeth me sodeynly
> Of hire that rometh in the yonder place.

At this Palamon rages. Are they not brothers in arms "y sworn ful depe neither in love to hindre other ?"

> I loved hire first and toldė thee my wo
> As to my conseil and my brother sworn.

But Arcite answers with subtle pleading, such as

was used in the Courts of Love. Palamon's was mere devotion, as to a goddess.

> But *paramour* I loved hire first er thow.

And in any case love overrides all law. For a while they quarrel thus over an abstract privilege. But on a day Perotheus, ally of Theseus, comes to visit Athens and begs the freedom of his friend Arcite. It is granted, but only on condition that Arcite shall avoid Athens on pain of death ; and so, while Palamon in his dungeon laments over his rival's freer chances, Arcite in Thebes envies Palamon, who can at least behold the lady ; and at last Arcite determines to return disguised and seek employment as a valet in the house of Theseus. But it chances that Palamon breaks prison, and, hiding in a wood, sees on a May morning Arcite, now prosperous, who is come out "to doon his observance to May" and sing of his unspoken love for Emelye. At this Palamon starts up from his hiding-place, and heaps reproaches on the false friend, which Arcite answers no less boldly with a challenge to combat. And so the next day at dawning Palamon meets Arcite, who brings a second horse and a second harness.

> Ther nas no Good day, ne no saluyng,
> But streight, withouten word or rehersyng,
> Everich of hem heelpe for to armen oother,
> As frendly as he were his owene brother ;
> And after that with sharpè sperès stronge,
> They foynen ech oother wonder longe.
> Thou mightest wenè that this Palamoun,
> In his fightyng were a wood leoun,
> And as a crueel tigre was Arcite ;
> As wildè borès gonnè they to smyte,
> That frothen whit as foom for irè wood, —
> Up to the ancle foghte they in hir blood.

But Theseus and his court had gone a hunting that day, and the hunt came in upon this duel.

Each combatant was due to death, and Theseus bids both be executed; but his queen, Ipolita, and her sister, the fair Emelye, intercede, and Theseus, yielding, appoints a great tournament to which either rival shall come with a hundred knights, and the victorious leader shall win Emelye for wife. Then follows copious description of the preparation, the lists, the champions, and lastly of the tourney itself, in which Palamon is defeated and taken, but Arcite is wounded to death, and on his deathbed reconciles the long rancour and jealous strife, and prays that Emelye should take pity on Palamon. But before this can be accomplished, the large and leisurely narrative tells how Arcite was buried, and how after certain years Theseus harangued his folk upon the changefulness of things and the need "To maken vertu of necessitee," with the conclusion that now is time for joy after long sorrow: and so at the last, after more than two thousand lines, Emelye and Palamon reach the happy ending.

There could be no better example of a mediaeval romance. Chaucer has a good story to tell and he makes the most of it, emphasising the points, asking you to consider, as experts in love, whether is more pitiable, Arcite free in Thebes, or Palamon beholding Emelye in Athens through a dungeon's grated window. And where the story needs a pause, after the pair have met in interrupted duel, and while they are gathering forces for the tourney, the poet heaps up ornament in his description of the lists, with their three temples of Venus, Mars, and Dian, that Theseus built. It is difficult to illustrate narrative poetry by citation, for its special merit lies in an easy and varied flow, disguising rather than accentuating the echo of the rhyme, the cadence of the metre. One may quote therefore from a famous passage which does not help

on the story, and therefore needs and receives a less simple treatment. It describes the temple of Mars and the pictures within it:

First, on the wal was peynted a forest,
In which ther dwelleth neither man nor best,
With knotty, knarry, bareyne treës olde
Of stubbës sharpe and hidouse to biholde,
In which ther ran a rumbel and a swough,
As though a storme sholde bresten every bough;
And dounward from an hille, under a bente,
Ther stood the temple of Mars armypotente.

* * * * *

There saugh I first the derke ymaginyng
Of felonye, and al the compassyng;
The crueel ire, reed as any gleede;
The pykëpurs, and eke the palë drede;
The smylere, with the knyfe under the cloke;
The shepnë, brennynge with the blakë smoke;
The tresoun of the mordrynge in the bedde;
The open werre, with woundës al bi-bledde;
Contek, with blody knyf, and sharpe manace;
Al ful of chirkyng was that sory place.
The sleere of hymself yet saugh I ther,
His hertë blood hath bathëd all his heer;
The nayl ydryven in the shode a-nyght;
The coldë deeth, with mouth gapyng upright.
Amyddës of the temple sat Meschaunce,
With disconfort and sorry contenaunce.

It will be noted how vivid is the presentment to the eye of image after image, and how great a master of condensation, when he chooses, is Chaucer, though for the most part so profuse. The student of verse should observe also how the alliteration is used to add to the emphasis of the verse, and moreover, how when he wishes Chaucer can echo the sense in his words — as in the lines describing the soughing of the Tracian forest.

But the poet has no intention of keeping his work at this romantic pitch. He turns from the elaborate rendering of Boccaccio's tale to the doings

of his English pilgrims. As the Knight ends the company declare each and all that it is "a noble tale and worthy for to drawen to memorie." The Host laughs and swears, and calls on the Monk to take up his turn ; but then begins a bustle, for the Miller is drunk and insists that he too has a noble tale.

> Oure Hoostè saugh that he was dronke of ale,
> And seyde, 'Abyd, Robyn, my leevè brother
> Som bettre man shal telle us first another;
> Abyde, and lat us werken thriftily.'
> 'By Goddès soule,' quod he, 'that wol not I,
> For I wol speke or ellès go my wey.'
> Oure Hoost answerde, 'Tel on a devele wey!
> Thou art a fool, thy wit is overcome.'
> 'Now herkneth,' quod the Millere, 'alle and some;
> But first I make a protestacioun
> That I am dronke, I knowe it by my soun;
> And, therfore, if that I mysspeke or seye,
> Wyte it the ale of Southwerk, I you preye.'

The *Miller's Tale* unhappily does not bear repetition ; and it was so contumelious towards a carpenter that though all else laughed loud, Reeve, one of the company who happened to be "of carpenteris craft," retorted with a similar story, in which a miller is the victim. And so the ball is kept rolling naturally, and the balance preserved. A long and grave tale is set off and followed by one or more lighter in kind, and at the end of each follows a passage giving the company's comments upon what is finished, and a preamble to what is to be told. Sometimes an incident by the road is inserted, for example the Cook's fall from his horse, or the more important interlude which tells how the company are overtaken by two galloping, who prove to be a canon and his yeoman. But the yeoman's tongue wags, and he soon begins to hint such things of his master's knavish exploits in alchemy, that the master gallops off in wrath and the man is left to

tell how a confiding priest was duped by the alchemist's sleight of hand. This tale, it may be observed, which furnished Ben Jonson with many hints for his play, *The Alchemist*, is the only one comic in tone which can be unreservedly recommended for general reading.

The scheme of the *Canterbury Tales* is not completed and the poem is not finished; but we have enough of these wayside discussions to regret what is not there, for each is a glimpse into the heart of Chaucer's England. Most notable of all the interludes is that of the 'Wife of Bath,' whose tongue, once loosed, goes like a clapper. Before she will start upon her tale she has to expound her whole philosophy of life in reference to her dealings with five husbands. Here is a specimen of her talk, relating how she kept in hand the first three of her series, who were "goode and riche and old." Her methods were not peaceable.

> Now herkneth how I bèar me proprely,
> Ye wysè wivès that kan understonde.
> Thus shall ye speke, and beren hem on honde;
> For half so boldèly kan ther no man
> Swere and lye as a womman kan —
> I say not this by wyvès that been wyse,
> But if it be when they hem mysavyse —
> I-wis a wyf, if that she kan hir good,
> Shal berè hym on hond the cow is wood,
> And takè witnesse of hir owene mayde
> Of hir assent; but herkneth how I sayde —
> 'Sire, oldè kaynard, is this thyn array?
> Why is my neighèborès wyf so gay?
> She is honóured over al ther she gooth;
> I sitte at hoom, I have no thrifty clooth.
> What dostow at my neighèborès hous?
> Is she so fair? artow so amorous?
> What rowne ye with oure mayde? *Benedicite!*'

There is nothing more Shakespearian in Chaucer than his presentment of this good lady, who might

be own sister of Dame Quickly. Charity itself could not say much for her, and yet Chaucer has nothing to say against her. He presents her; there she is in her rank strong life, and he is rather inclined to like her for being so much alive. For Chaucer, like Shakespeare, is enamoured of life; life fascinates and holds him. Her story, when after repeated protests she does begin to tell it, is worth noting, for Chaucer makes her quote Ovid and Dante, and it is moral and sentimental in tone. But one must remember that Ovid, at least, was one of the most popular authors of that age, and that the dame's fifth husband was a great reader. Moreover, in the last lines she deduces from the tale a highly characteristic lesson. It is, however, only when she, or any other of the pilgrims, is talking in the interludes, that whatever each says is perfectly appropriate to the character.

The great bulk of the *Canterbury Tales* is written in the heroic couplet, which Chaucer was the first to employ in English, having found it in the French of Machault, from whom he borrowed also the seven-lined stanza used in *Troilus and Criseyde* and four of the *Canterbury Tales*. An example of this (which came to be called "rhyme royal" because of its use by Chaucer's disciple, the poet King James I. of Scotland) may be given from the *Clerk's Tale*. It is taken from Grisilde's reply to her husband's order to take that she brought with her and begone.

> But ther as ye me profré swich dowaire
> As I first broghte, it is wel in my mynde
> It were my wrecchèd clothès, nothyng faire,
> The whiche to me were hard now for to fynde.
> O goodè God, how gentil and how kynde
> Ye semèd by youre speche and youre visage
> The day that makèd was our mariage!
>
> But sooth is seyd, algate I fynde it trewe,
> For in effect it preevèd is on me,

Love is noght oold as whan that it is newe!
But certès, lord, for noon adversitee,
To dyèn in the cas, it shal not bee
That ever in word or werk I shal repente
That I yow yaf myn herte in hool entente.

Two other things should be noted. Chaucer himself is called on for a tale, and the host, railing him, gives a notion of his appearance.

'What man artow?' quod he;
'Thou lokest as thou woldest finde an hare,
For ever up-on the ground I see thee stare.
* * * * *
Approchè neer, and loke up merily.
Now war yow, sirs, and lat this man have place;
He in the waast is shape as wel as I;
This were a popet in an arm t' enbrace
For any womman, smal and fair of face—
He semeth elvish by his contenaunce,
For un-to no wight dooth he daliaunce.'

Chaucer responds with the rhyme of Sir Thopas, which is a parody on the rambling doggerel romances popular in his day, till mine host interrupts

Na moore of this for Godde's dignitee.

And Chaucer then turns to a prose 'Tale of Melibeus,' which, to speak the truth, is not much livelier. Also the conclusion of the Tales is a moral prose discourse by the Poor Parson, an admirable but tedious pilgrim. And to the end of certain manuscripts of the Tales is added a prose Retractation, in which Chaucer beseeches God's mercy for having written nearly all that he ever did write. It should be taken into account in any estimate of the man. But it may fairly be said that if Chaucer had left us nothing but what he exempts from censure — chief among which is a prose version of Boethius — the world would have been infinitely the poorer and none the better. Out of verse he was no artist; and three centuries had to elapse

before men manipulated the language in prose with the supple freedom that Chaucer showed in his less moral writings. No one can call the *Canterbury Tales* exactly edifying; Chaucer lived in an age that was plainer spoken than ours, and he was a courtier at a court which was certainly no school of the virtues. But he brought unembittered through the long trial of precarious dependence a sunny gaiety which is the great charm of his work. "Gentleness and cheerfulness are the perfect virtues," said Stevenson, "they come before all morality." And Chaucer was undoubtedly, and teaches to be, both gentle and cheerful.

CHAPTER II

SPENSER

Nothing more fully proves the precocity, as it were, of Chaucer's genius than the long gap which succeeds him. Nearly two hundred years had to elapse from the time when he made his pilgrimage before English literature could show anything worthy to be set beside the *Canterbury Tales*. But when the new burst of poetry came it came with a rush. In 1579 English literature had little of worth but Chaucer: within thirty years it was the richest of all spoken tongues. Two schools of literary art, contemporary in time but distinct in tendency, wrought this change. These were, first, the group of court poets and critics, from which issued Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the swan-song of mediaevalism; and, secondly, the group of actors and playwrights and professional writers who, under the ban of Church and Government, and the contempt of the critics, bought modern poetry obscurely to the birth.

Edmund Spenser was born about 1552 at London, of gentle parentage and well connected. Educated at Merchant Taylor's School, he went with a scholarship to Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, at the age of

seventeen ; and so early as this he was translating Petrarch's sonnets with remarkable mastery. He stayed at Cambridge for seven years (till 1576), and then spent some time in Lancashire, before he came to London, attached to Leicester's household. During this later period, after his departure from Cambridge, he was in love with a lady who rejected his love, — the 'Rosalind,' whose beauty and cruelty are celebrated by him in many of his shorter poems. In October, 1579, was published his first important work, *The Shepheards Calender*, and the long deferred advent of a new and true poet was immediately recognised.

Two men had a great influence in moulding Spenser's mind. One was Gabriel Harvey, fellow of Pembroke, a pedant of much ability. The other was Sir Philip Sidney, the most brilliant of Elizabeth's courtiers, who had adopted enthusiastically Harvey's academic theories. The general result of these theories may be summed up thus : That the true aim of literature was to convey moral instruction ; that all literature should imitate the Greek and Latin models ; that the drama should observe unity of time and place, and keep tragedy and comedy distinct ; and lastly, that rhyme was an ignoble artifice, and that English should adopt the classic method of scansion by long and short syllables. The effect of this was to make Sidney and Spenser both waste much time in composing lamentable hexameters, and to estrange both from the popular drama. Gradually, however, each of the two escaped from the theories ; and Sidney has left, in his series of sonnets *Astrophel and Stella*, the record of a passionate love story in very beautiful and natural verse, while Spenser is among the three or four great masters of English metre. But Harvey's influence may be answerable

for the fact that Spenser's poetry, and also the work by which Sidney was best known, is to an extraordinary degree artificial, out of direct touch with the life and language of men. Spenser, in his abhorrence of the modern, arranges the world to fit with a literary convention, which makes of his great book the fabric of a dream. Masquerade, as Dean Church has observed, was essential to this school of poetic art. "When the subject belonged to peace, the masquerade was one of shepherds; when it was one of war and adventure, it was a masquerade of knight-errantry." Spenser, attempting first subjects of peace, followed the example which had been already set by Sidney in his prose poem *Arcadia* and wrote pastoral eclogues. Into this form, sanctioned as classical by Virgil's usage, he introduced a new feature by a deliberate strangeness of language — which in certain of the eclogues he achieved by affecting the dialect of Lancashire clowns, grown familiar to him during his residence in the north. There are twelve of these eclogues, one for each month, and they vary in subject — some being satires on the abuses in the Church, some, laments uttered by Colin Clout (the name which the poet gives himself) for Rosalind's unkindness. Unequal as the work is, there are many passages of beauty; for example:

> Such rage as winters reigneth in my heart,
> My life bloud friesing with unkindly cold;
> Such stormy stoures do breede my balefull smart
> As if my yeare were wast and woxen old.
> *And yet, alas! but now my spring begonne,*
> *And yet, alas! it is already donne.*

It is noteworthy that we find Spenser here experimenting in a great variety of metres, and often unhappily. The principle of Chaucer's

scansion had been lost by Elizabeth's day, and men took for roughness in him what was really studied and smooth; and perhaps this error, perhaps the example of ballad verse, always composed in rough stresses, led Spenser to attempt some jingling ill-balanced rhythms. A few lines may be given in instance:

> Who will not suffer the stormy time,
> Where will he live tyll the lusty prime?
> Selfe have worn out thrise threttie yeares
> Some in much joy, many in many tears.

It is astonishing that this should have been written by so great a master of English metre as Spenser showed himself in his more famous poem — his masquerade of war.

Just as the *Shepheards Calender* reflects in a distorting mirror the truth of Spenser's own early life and thoughts, so, but with a stranger distortion, does the *Faerie Queene* reflect the experience of his manhood. In 1580, leaving Leicester's service, he went to Ireland as secretary to Lord Grey of Wilton, then appointed Lord Deputy. During Elizabeth's reign the gradual grasping of Irish lands by English adventurers had been quickened; and the resistance, which is termed rebellion, had been fiercer. Lord Grey came in to crush the last of the Desmond rising, and after two years was recalled. His methods were bloodier than even that Government could sanction, yet Lord Grey figures in the *Faerie Queene*, as Sir Arthegall, the incarnation of Justice. Spenser remained in Ireland, as Clerk to the Council of Munster, and in 1586, being one of the 'Undertakers,' or Englishmen who undertook to replace the ousted Irish, he received a grant of some 3000 acres with Kilcolman, a ruined castle of the Desmonds, south of the Galtee Hills. The

wildernesses and forests which Spenser describes in his poems were not fictitious, for English war had made wide desolation in Munster ; and the Satyrs, a half bestial people of the wilds, who figure repeatedly in his cantos, have their originals in the native Irish. In these surroundings he worked upon that plan of a fantastic allegory which, before he left England, he had communicated to Harvey. Raleigh, whom he met in England after the Armada's ruin, encouraged him to continue, encouraged him to return to Court ; and accordingly in 1589 Spenser did return, bringing the first three books which, with their adulatory dedication, were offered to Elizabeth. And, again, the new poet's production was greeted with general applause. But praise was plentier at Court than pudding, and early in 1591 another volume was issued, wherein, along with two famous threnodies, *The Ruines of Time* and *The Teares of the Muses* (the former of which laments the deaths of Leicester and Sidney, and the latter the decay of poetry), appeared *Mother Hubberds Tale of the Ape and the Fox*, a bitter satire upon Elizabeth's Court. Here is a passage which shows how little natural was archaism to Spenser's language, and how magnificently he forestalled Dryden's use of the heroic couplet.

> Full little knowest thou, that hast not tride,
> What hell it is, in suing long to bide:
> To loose good dayes, that might be better spent;
> To wast long nights in pensive discontent;
> To speed today, to be put back tomorrow;
> To feed on hope, to pine with feare and sorrow;
> To have thy Princes grace, yet want her Peeres;
> To have thy asking, yet waite manie yeeres;
> To fret thy soule with crosses and with cares;
> To eate thy heart through comfortlesse dispaires;
> To fawne, to crowche, to waite, to ride, to ronne,
> To spend, to give, to want, to be undonne.

By 1591 he was back at Kilcolman where he wrote the story of his visit to Court in another allegoric pastoral, *Colin Clouts Come Home Again.* Three more books of the *Faerie Queene* were written, probably before he married in 1594 — and celebrated his marriage with that superb ode, his *Epithalamion.* Four years later came disaster. The Irish earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell set the whole country in a flame that spread from the north to Munster, and in October, 1598, Spenser had to fly for his life from the country whose land and streams he loved, and whose people he hated. He died in January, 1599, at London, in great poverty — a victim to the vengeance of a race whose extermination, as a race, is advocated in his prose treatise, *A View of the State of Ireland.*

His great work, the *Faerie Queene*, was planned before he went to Ireland, and was executed there during the years 1580–95. Long as it is — making six books, each containing twelve cantos, and each canto some forty stanzas of nine lines — we have only the half of his project. As there were twelve cantos in each book, so there were to be twelve books in the poem ; and by an odd arrangement, only in the twelfth were readers to receive an explanation of what the Faery Court might be, and what cause sent out these knights on their quest. Each book was planned to deal mainly with the adventures of one knight who typified a single virtue ; thus the Red Crosse Knight is Holiness, Sir Guyon is Temperance, the Amazon Britomart is Chastity. And each knight was to meet opposition from foes specially antagonistic ; thus Holiness combats Error and Despair, Temperance defeats Fury and License. Moreover, each was to be rescued at a critical moment by the central hero of the poem, Prince Arthur, not yet a king, in

whom, says Spenser (expounding his purpose by an open letter to Raleigh, prefixed at the first publication) "I labour to pourtraict . . . the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private Morall Vertues."

Here then we reach the first historic or legendary character figuring among those emblematic shadows. Arthur was the central figure in one of the great cycles of mediaeval romance, which, invented in Wales, was taken by the Normans to France, and was borrowed back from France and Englished by Sir Thomas Malory. Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, finished in 1470, was among the first books printed by Caxton, and is the only composition in the gap between Chaucer and Spenser which is commonly read to-day. The rehandling of the theme, first by Spenser, then by Tennyson, has no doubt contributed to this survival, but Malory's prose is well worthy of prolonged life.

It should be noted that in Malory, as in the old legends, Lancelot is the true hero; but Spenser, like Tennyson, chooses King Arthur for glorification as the ideal knight. Spenser's realm of Faery is, however, wholly of his own devising. The Arthur of his poem, pursuing a mysterious Gloriana, queen of this half-mortal land, is not Guinevere's spouse. It did not suit Spenser's purpose to follow the legend, for behind his allegory of qualities is a second allegorisation of persons. Gloriana and the Faery Court stand for Elizabeth and her circle: Prince Arthur himself is sometimes Leicester, sometimes Sidney. But the allegorisation is not simple. Elizabeth is Gloriana, but she is also Belphoebe, the huntress nymph, who rages against the love of Timias for Florimel, as Elizabeth raged at the second marriage of Timias' counterpart, Raleigh. Duessa the enchantress, fair and foul, is Mary of

Scotland ; but Mary can also be traced in the cruel queen Radigund, who by womanish treachery subdues Sir Arthegall or Lord Grey, till the captive knight is released by Britomart, who at this stage certainly stands for Elizabeth.

The poem is therefore one which can only be fully understood by the help of a commentary, and there are no doubt many allusions, clear to the personages of whom and for whom Spenser wrote, which now cannot be grasped. Moreover, no commentary can give a coherent account of the allegory or of the story, for each lacks coherence. The allegoric plan, carefully carried out in the first two books, is less and less observed as the poem proceeds, and the story drifts like a ship rudderless. Possibly Spenser felt that a too formal adherence to his scheme would spoil the charm and seeming good faith of his narrative. Even with all the license that he takes to wander as he pleases, the book is wearisome to read through. But owing to the lack of structural completeness there is no occasion to read through more than one pleases, and to enjoy Spenser it is wholly unnecessary to trouble about either his allegoric or historic references. Keats, in whom Spenser first kindled the poetic desire, certainly knew nothing of Lord Grey or his destroying army, the Talus of the fable. He doubtless read Spenser, as those read him who love the *Faerie Queene*, for the recital of a wonderful series of dreams, set out with sustained splendour and beauty by a dreamer whose visions are all seen with an extraordinary fulness of detail and luxuriance of colour. Spenser's work recalls the peculiar magnificence of Gothic buildings by the intricate wealth of ornament afforded in the beauty of phrase, the melody of the verse and the power of suggestion. One may instance many brief

examples, as the Red Cross Knight's entry into Error's Den :

> But full of fire and greedy hardiment,
> The youthfull Knight could not for ought be staide;
> But forth unto the darksom hole he went
> And looked in; *his glistring armour made*
> *A litle glooming light, much like a shade.*

Or the two exquisite lines on Belphoebe :

> Her birth was of the wombe of morning dew,
> And her conception of the joyous prime.

But Spenser needs to be judged in longer extracts. Here are three stanzas from his description of Mammon :

> At last he came unto a gloomy glade,
> Covered with boughes and shrubs from heavens light,
> Whereas he sitting found in secret shade
> An uncouth, salvage, and uncivile wight,
> Of griesly hew and foule ill favour'd sight;
> His face with smoke was tand and eies were bleard,
> His head and beard with sout were ill bedight,
> His cole-blacke hands did seeme to have ben seard
> In smythes fire-spitting forge, and nayles like clawes appeard.
>
> His yron cote, all overgrowne with rust,
> Was underneath enveloped with gold;
> Whose glistring glosse, darkened with filthy dust,
> Well yet appeared to have beene of old
> A worke of rich entayle and curious mould,
> Woven with antickes and wyld ymagery;
> And in his lap a masse of coyne he told,
> And turned upside downe, to feede his eye
> And covetous desire with his huge threasury.
>
> And round about him lay on every side
> Great heapes of gold that never could be spent;
> Of which some were rude owre, not purifide
> Of Mulcibers devouring element;
> Some others were new driven, and distent
> Into great Ingowes and to wedges square;
> Some in round plates withouten moniment;
> But most were stampt, and in their metal bare
> The antique shapes of kings and kesars straunge and rare.

Here again is a pastoral motive enriched and glorified, as a country tune might be by some great musician, working it into his own elaborate harmony:

Unto this place when as the Elfin Knight
Approcht, him seemed that the merry sound
Of a shrill pipe he playing heard on hight,
And many feete fast thumping th' hollow ground,
That through the woods their Eccho did rebound.
He nigher drew to weete what mote it be:
There he a troupe of Ladies dauncing found
Full merrily, and making gladfull glee,
And in the midst a Shepheard piping he did see.

He durst not enter into th' open greene,
For dread of them un'wares to be descryde
For breaking of their daunce, if he were seene;
But in the covert of the wood did byde,
Beholding all, yet of them unespyde.
There he did see that pleased much his sight,
That even he him selfe his eyes envyde,
An hundred naked maidens lilly white
All raunged in a ring and dauncing in delight.

All they without were raunged in a ring,
And dauncing round; but in the midst of them
Three other Ladies did both daunce and sing,
The whilest the rest them round about did hemme,
And like a girlond did in compasse stemme:
And in the middest of those same three was placed
Another Damzell, as a precious gemme
Amidst a ring most richly well enchaced,
That with her goodly presence all the rest much graced.

Looke! how the crowne, which Ariadne wore
Upon her yvory forehead, that same day
That Theseus her unto his bridale bore,
When the bold Centaures made that bloudy fray
With the fierce Lapithes which did them dismay,
Being now placed in the firmament,
Through the bright heaven doth her beams display,
And is unto the starres an ornament,
Which round about her move in order excellent.

Such was the beauty of this goodly band,
Whose sundry parts were here too long to tell;

But she that in the midst of them did stand
Seem'd all the rest in beauty to excell,
Crownd with a rosie girlond that right well
Did her beseeme: And ever, as the crew
About her daunst, sweet flowres that far did smell
And fragrant odours they uppon her threw;
But most of all those three did her with gifts endew.

Those were the Graces, daughters of delight,
Handmaides of Venus, which are wont to haunt
Uppon this hill, and daunce there day and night:
Those three to men all gifts of grace do graunt;
And all that Venus in her selfe doth vaunt
Is borrowed of them. But that faire one,
That in the midst was placed paravaunt,
Was she to whom that shepheard pypt alone;
That made him pipe so merrily, as never none.

She was, to weete, that jolly Shepheards lasse,
Which piped there unto that merry rout;
That jolly shepheard, which there piped, was
Poore Colin Clout, (who knowes not Colin Clout?)
He pypt apace, whilest they him daunst about.
Pype, jolly shepheard, pype thou now apace
Unto thy love that made thee low to lout:
Thy love is present there with thee in place;
Thy love is there advaunst to be another Grace.

Lastly, may be given one stanza (Bk. I., C. I., 41), which resembles and perhaps surpasses the splendid opening of Tennyson's *Lotus Eaters*:

And more to lulle him in his slumber soft,
A trickling streame from high rock tumbling downe,
And ever-drizling raine upon the loft,
Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swowne.
No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes,
As still are wont t' annoy the walled towne,
Might there be heard; but carelesse Quiet lyes
Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enimyes.

The stanza of the *Faerie Queene* which was Spenser's invention, and has ever since borne his name, lends itself admirably to stately moralising, the final Alexandrine coming in with a wavelike roll

at the end. But Spenser used it with extraordinary skill for narrative as well, as witness the Red Cross Knight's great combat with the dragon. It is no doubt not a natural medium for narrative, but it accords well with the deliberately artificial character both of the tale and the language. What Spenser wrote was a dialect never spoken: it contains indeed many disused words, but also many words, and what is less excusable, many grammatical forms, that have no precedent. Ben Jonson said roughly that Spenser in affecting the ancients wrote no English. Alike in style and subject his work is deeply tinged with unreality; with that passion for make-believe which infected the whole of Elizabeth's court and reached its height in the cult of Elizabeth's own person. However one may admire the exotic beauty of Spenser's studied mediaevalism, it is difficult not to feel some impatience with it. Even when he writes in all sincerity, as in the *Epithalamion*, or the scarcely less beautiful *Prothalamion, or Spousal Verse*, written for the marriage of the daughters of the Earl of Worcester, he writes with a certain deliberate archaism, as if afraid to be himself or of his own time. One turns with relief from him to the fresh accent of his contemporary who wrote the first great poetry in the English that we speak to-day.

It is needless to describe again the slow evolution of the English drama from those performances by which the Catholic Church sought to impress the events of Scripture history and the moral lessons of religion upon an audience which had few books and little skill in reading. Roughly speaking, tragedy "began to form itself out of serious pieces

detached in detail from the miracle plays," such as the story of King Darius or the Conversion of St. Paul; while comedy had its forerunner in the 'morality' in which allegorical personages, such as Youth, Sin, Good works, and, above all, Death or the Devil figured on the stage. One of these old moralities, *Everyman*, when played recently, showed by its hold on modern audiences how strong a dramatic power lay under the rude form. But the age of Elizabeth was an age of speculation rather than of growth, of interest in this world and this life far more than in the next: and men and women soon banished abstractions from the stage. But the theatre retained the simple character of the religious performances. Sidney in his *Defence of Poesie* denounces, from Harvey's academic standpoint, the popular dramas which observed neither unity of place nor time, nor unity of tone, but were ready to bring Asia on one side of the stage and Africa on the other, and to let comedy jostle tragedy. These plays, faithful to their origin, troubled little about verisimilitude or classic example; their object was to tell a story, bringing it home by means of dialogue, gesture, and action. And presently, in defiance of the academicians, men of scholarly training threw their talent into this form. Shakespeare's forerunners, Peele, Greene, Lodge, Nash, and, above all, Marlowe, were university men, who, seeking to live by their wits, fell to producing the form of literature for which there was a demand, not among the coteries, but among the people.

Christopher Marlowe was born in February, 1564, two months before Shakespeare. He was educated at Cambridge, and in or about 1588 the first part of *Tamburlaine* was acted, George Alleyn, the famous actor of that day, playing the tyrant. The

tragedy of *Dr. Faustus* was written not later than 1590, the year when Spenser published the *Faerie Queene*. The *Jew of Malta*, and the chronicle play *Edward II.*, as well as much inferior dramatic work done in collaboration with Nash, and the exquisite though unfinished narrative poem *Hero and Leander*, were all completed before June, 1593, when Marlowe came by a miserable end — stabbed in a tavern brawl by a serving-man.

Thus it appears that in the very years when Spenser was composing the fantastic dialect and unreal sentiment of the *Faerie Queene*, Marlowe was writing such verse as we find in Tamburlaine's passionate outcry over the beauty of his chosen queen, whose magic he can neither express nor comprehend:

> If all the pens that ever poets held
> Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,
> And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,
> Their minds and muses on admired themes;
> If all the heavenly quintessence they still
> From their immortal flowers of poesy,
> Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive
> The highest reaches of a human wit;
> If these had made one poem's period,
> And all combined in beauty's worthiness,
> Yet should there hover in their restless heads
> One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,
> Which into words no virtue can digest.

He was writing the exclamation of Faustus when, by the magic power for which he has bartered his soul, Helen is raised up before him in her living semblance:

> Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
> And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
> Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss —
> Her lips suck forth my soul; see where it flies! —
> * * * * *
> Oh! thou art fairer than the evening air
> Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars;

Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter
When he appeared to hapless Semele;
More lovely than the monarch of the sky
For wanton Arethusa's azured arms:
And none but thou shalt be my paramour.

He was writing the lines which tell of

women or unwedded maids
Shadowing more beauty in their airy brows
Than have the white breasts of the Queen of Love.

At a time when Spenser was spending his profuse talent in describing the material horrors and delights of an enchanted kingdom, Marlowe was writing the answer of Mephistopheles to Faustus' question:

Faust. And what are you that live with Lucifer?
Meph. Unhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer.
Conspired against our God with Lucifer
And are for ever damned with Lucifer.
Faust. Where are you damned?
Meph. In hell.
Faust. How comes it then that thou art out of hell?
Meph. Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.
Think'st thou that I who saw the face of God
And tasted the eternal joys of Heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells,
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?

In the language, in the thought of these passages, we find a poetry that shows the genius of the English race in all its adult perfection.

It cannot be said that the plays, viewed as complete works of art, approach this standard. *Tamburlaine* contains more bombast than any piece of English literature. But nothing could be more wonderful than the fire and force which sustain this drama of rhetoric without humour, without action, and without love interest. It is the presentment of a world-conqueror's lust for

power, and in scene after scene king opposes king in debate, with rival boastings and threatenings; in scene after scene the conquered and captive monarch heaps curses on his conqueror, who replies with taunts. Marlowe has fed his imagination with the thoughts of what world-conquest might mean, and the names of strange towns and countries clash and rattle in his verse, along with "numbers more than infinite of men."

> And I have marched along the river Nile
> To Machda where the mighty Christian priest,
> Called John the Great, sits in a milk-white robe,
> Whose triple mitre I did take by force,
> And made him swear obedience to my crown,
> From thence unto Cazates did I march,
> Where Amazonians met me in the field,
> With whom, being women, I vouchsafed a league,
> And with my power did march to Zanzibar,
> The eastern part of Afric, where I viewed
> The Ethiopian sea, rivers and lakes,
> But neither man nor child in all the land;
> Therefore I took my course to Manico,
> Where unresisted, I removed my camp,
> And by the coast of Byather, at last
> I came to Cubar, where the negroes dwell,
> And conquering that, made haste to Nubia.
> There having sacked Borno, the kingly seat,
> I took the king, and led him bound in chains
> Unto Damasco, where I stayed before.

But in his second play Marlowe rose from depicting Tamburlaine, "the Scourge of God and terror of the world," to a yet greater range of power; to the study of one tempted with a magic that should give him mastery of all knowledge with power over spirits omnipotent. Yet, more than the advance in sublimity, one notes the advance in dramatic art. He does not seek to make us feel the power of Faustus so much as the continuous struggle between remorse and temptation, ending

with the tremendous final scene where the magician waits his doom.

Ah Faustus,
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live
And then thou must be damned perpetually!
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of Heaven,
That time may cease, and midnight never come;
Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again and make
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul!
O lente, lente, currite noctis equi!
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
The Devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.
O, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?
See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament.
One drop would save my soul — half a drop — ah, my Christ!
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!
Yet will I call on him: O spare me, Lucifer! —
Where is it now? 'tis gone; and see where God
Stretcheth out his arm and bends his ireful brows!
Mountain and hills, come, come and fall on me,
And hide me from the heavy wrath of God!

It will be noted also how the verse varies here from the "drumming decasyllabon" of *Tamburlaine*. In the *Jew of Malta* (Shylock's forerunner) there are yet finer passages; and in *Edward II.* Marlowe achieved a severer pathos and finer movement of the verse than had at that date been compassed by his younger rival and imitator. And though Tamburlaine in his car dragged by captive kings, with his admonitions,

Holla, ye pampered jades of Asia
What, can ye draw but twenty miles a day?

might be parodied by Ancient Pistol, yet Shakespeare and all men knew what Shakespeare and the Elizabethan drama owed to Marlowe.

It is very probable that Shakespeare collaborated with Marlowe in rehandling that sequence of his-

torical plays which we know as the three parts of *Henry VI.* It is certain that the young actor-playwright learnt much from "Marlowe's mighty line." His play of *Richard III.*, as Mr. Lee points out, follows the model of *Tamburlaine*, with its violent scenes of rival threatenings and cursings: his *Richard II.* recalls immediately Marlowe's presentment of another feeble king, vainly appealing to the majesty of a crown among his overbearing barons and their rough retainers. And the most curious of all the contemporary references to Shakespeare comes from that group of penniless University-bred playwrights whom Shakespeare succeeded and eclipsed. Robert Greene, a disreputable Bohemian and bad playwright, but a writer of exquisite and pathetic lyric verse, wrote a kind of death-bed confession called *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance.* In this he addresses a public appeal to three of his fellow-playwrights, and implores them to desist from the making of plays. The first addressed is unquestionably Marlowe.

"Wonder not (for with thee I will first begin) thou famous gracer of tragedians, that Greene who hath said with thee, like the fool in his heart, There is no God, should now give glory unto his greatness." A little further comes the warning against the treachery of actors, ("those antics garnished in our colours,") "Yes, trust them not; for there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *tiger's heart wrapt in a player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and being an absolute *Johannes factotum* is in his own conceit the only *Shakescene* in a country."

There is no reason to believe that Marlowe was jealous of the growing talent; and though Shake-

speare put into Ancient Pistol's mouth a parody of Tamburlaine's ranting address to the captive kings who drew his chariot on the stage, he made amends by quoting twice explicitly from Marlowe's poems.

> Dead Shepherd! now I find thy saw of might,
> Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?

cries Rosalind, and the line quoted comes from *Hero and Leander*; the phrase 'shepherd' keeping a reminiscence of the pastoral affectation, which found only its most famous instance in Spenser. And Sir Hugh Evans in the *Merry Wives* sings snatches from Marlowe's lyric, *Come live with me and be my love*, which preserved its popularity so long, that Izaak Walton, fifty years later, makes his anglers hear a girl haymaking and her mother sing it in a field, with Sir Walter Raleigh's reply, "If all the world and love were young."

Yet although Marlowe left great examples to Shakespeare and the rest in the splendour and variety of his verse (which from the first dispensed completely with the ornament of rhyme, a stage not reached by Shakespeare till his maturity), in the great rendering of great passions, and above all in the lesson, so alien to mediaeval conventions, that besides love there are many passions fit for poetic treatment; still, it cannot be said that Shakespeare learnt from Marlowe his greatest excellences. Marlowe's plots are poor in invention: given a great situation, like that of Faustus awaiting death, he can rise to its height, but he has no skill in contriving such effects, and in all his dramas there is a tendency to repeat one situation frequently, act after act; Tamburlaine's mockery of Bajazet, Bajazet's curses upon Tamburlaine, Edward's pleading with his barons, Queen Isabel's pleadings with Edward recur disagreeably.

His range of character is limited, and he is incapable of rendering feminine charm. Again, he lacked humour; his comic scenes are merely clowning, and they are not knit into the fabric of the play. They could indeed all, or almost all, be omitted, as was done by the editor of *Tamburlaine*. And in the Elizabethan drama comic scenes were a necessity, since they aimed at a purely popular audience, and had not those spectacular resources nor variations of dance and song by which the intellectual strain of tragedy was mitigated to a Greek audience. It was left for Shakespeare to produce a poetry, at once popular and magnificent, in strict conformity with the conditions and requirements of that stage.

CHAPTER III

SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare was born at Stratford, in April, 1564. He was the son of a shopkeeper, who, as is common in country towns, drove a miscellaneous trade and owned farms. The dramatist, his third child and eldest son, was educated at the Stratford grammar school, where he learnt at least rudiments of the classics. But towards his thirteenth year, the growing misfortunes of his father, whose prosperity had waned rapidly, caused him to be taken from school and probably employed in the business — according to an old tradition, as a butcher. At the age of eighteen and a half, to mend matters, he married Anne Hathaway, daughter of a small yeoman at Shottery, a neighbouring hamlet, who was eight years older than himself. The marriage, contracted in December, 1582, was in all ways inauspicious. A daughter, Susanna, was born to the pair in May, 1583, and twins, Judith and Hamnet, in January or February, 1585. Thus Shakespeare, before he was one-and-twenty, found himself the father of three children, with a peasant wife whose attractions had passed their best day, and with no property or fixed means of livelihood.

Further, the keen taste for sport which is evinced by a hundred passages in his writings, had got him into trouble. As a poacher he had suffered, especially from Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote, "who," according to a 17th century account, "had him oft whipt and sometimes imprisoned, and at last made him fly his native country to his great advancement." Sir Thomas by this rigour contributed to two immortalities, for he himself survives imperishably as Mr. Justice Shallow.

Thus driven out to seek his fortune, Shakespeare came to London, where one fellow-townsman, Richard Field, was at work in a printing office, and before long became Shakespeare's first publisher. But it was not chiefly by the profession of letters that Shakespeare found the fortune which he sought. In some capacity, probably at first a menial one, he attached himself to the chief among five or six companies of licensed actors then existing. Each of these troops was called by the name of the nobleman through whose intervention they procured exemption from the act which classed them as rogues and vagabonds ; and this company, which when Shakespeare joined it was probably the Earl of Leicester's, became first Lord Strange's, then the Lord Chamberlain's, and lastly, on James's accession, the King's players. Whether Shakespeare distinguished himself first as an actor or as a playwright, we cannot tell ; but there is ample evidence that he was a successful impersonator of many parts, though never, like Molière, supreme both as dramatist and player. The two parts which we know him to have played are the Ghost in *Hamlet* and Old Adam in *As You Like It* — secondary rôles, but giving a considerable chance to the actor.

The rest of what is positively known about

Shakespeare's life, apart from the record of his literary activity, may be very briefly stated. In 1596 he returned to Stratford, so far enriched that he could purchase New Place, the largest house in the town. This was only the nucleus of a property in houses and land which he steadily built up and visited yearly, till in 1611 he left London for good, and resided in Stratford till April 23rd, 1616, when he died at the age of fifty-two, an esquire with a coat of arms, a justice of the peace, the most substantial burgess of Stratford, and the author of thirty-seven plays and some poems — of whose fate he seems to have been wholly careless. His daughters and wife survived him; his son had died in boyhood.

Mr. Lee's admirable researches have shown that this career, though from a financial point of view remarkable, can be wholly accounted for. We know really a great deal of Shakespeare's life on its business side, and can follow out his investments, his acquisitions, and his disputes.[1] His prosperity is not accounted for by the success of his plays, for which he would have received sums varying from ten to twenty pounds apiece — representing, even if we take Mr. Lee's estimate and multiply by eight, only an income of some £150 to £200 in our money, as he wrote on an average two a year. But as an actor, Mr. Lee reckons that he earned at least one hundred pounds (worth say £600 to £800) annually, before 1599, in which year the famous Globe Theatre was built by the actor

[1] The popular argument that Shakespeare must have been a lawyer's clerk because of his familiarity with terms of law is baseless, for he was the son of a man much engaged in litigation, both as plaintiff and defendant, and was himself frequently a litigant. Many Irish peasants, as Miss Edgeworth knew, have a knowledge of legal technicalities minuter than any which Shakespeare displays.

Richard Burbadge, in partnership with his brother, and shares were given "to those deserving men, Shakespeare, Hemings, Condell, Philips, and others." The annual value of the shares was computed in 1635 at £200 a year, and Mr. Lee reckons Shakespeare's earnings from the Globe Theatre for the last twelve years of his London life at five hundred a year. This means certainly that Shakespeare's income would have to be counted in thousands of our money.

It is worth insisting on this, for our best ascertained knowledge of Shakespeare's private character shows him as the successful man of business. In curious contrast with his forethought relating to money, is the carelessness regarding his works. The only publications undertaken by his own wish were the narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and the *Rape of Lucrece*. His sonnets were issued in 1609, probably against his desire : though they had been freely circulated in manuscript, as was the fashion of that day. Regarding the plays, it is easily to be explained why no publication took place by his sanction. There was then no copyright, so that an author could not benefit to any considerable extent by the sale of a book. And as partner in a dramatic company, Shakespeare had a direct interest in avoiding publication. For it must be understood that in Shakespeare's day the stage covered the whole ground now filled by the theatre, the music-hall, and the novel. People came to the play, as now, to see and hear acting ; they came also to hear songs and see comic dances, which were thrown irrelevantly even into such a play as *Lear* ; but they came above all to be interested by a story. Many of Shakespeare's chronicle plays are far more like a good modern historical romance than like a modern drama ; they aim much

less strictly at condensation or scenes where a violent collision of character takes place than at presenting in sequence a series of interesting events. They are, as we know, not less good to read than to see acted, and it was not profitable for the players that this rival attraction should exist. Of Shakespeare's thirty-seven plays only sixteen were published in his lifetime, and many of the quartos thus issued show by their imperfections that they were printed from an unauthorised copy. But the folio edition, containing thirty-six plays, was not printed till seven years after the poet's death, at the suggestion of his fellows, poets and players both. He himself left no directions that the score of plays existing only in manuscript at his death should be printed or in any way preserved ; and he took no steps to correct the faulty copies issued in his life. Explain it as we may, this is the most astounding fact in the history of literature.

It is a fact difficult to reconcile with what he writes again and again in the sonnets ; for instance :

> Not marble nor the gilded monuments
> Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme.

Are we to suppose, then, that Shakespeare felt that his work could take care of itself, and defy even printer's errors ? or that he counted the sonnets as his only poetry and left the plays possibly to the fate which has overtaken one of his latest comedies, the lost *Cardenio* ? or that in this passage, and generally throughout the sonnets, he was merely concerned to give expression to a fine sentiment for which his real feelings afforded no warrant ? The last is the view taken by Mr. Lee, who points out that when Shakespeare wrote sonnets, he was

conforming to a prevalent fashion. In the last twenty years of that century sonnet-writing was a craze, and poet rivalled poet in treatment of the same theme. All followed Petrarch's example, and made their sonnets the expression of a love which certainly in some cases — by the poet's own avowal — had no existence in reality. There is no question that a hundred passages parallel to that cited above can be produced, and Shakespeare's is only the finest treatment of the conventional theme. But we may well concede that in thus asserting immortality for his works — as he does here and in half-a-dozen other sonnets — Shakespeare merely writes for effect, and that he in reality attached no higher value to his writings than did Scott to his, and yet not make the admission that the sonnets are merely imaginative exercises. Artists naturally throw their actual feelings into the mould of a convention, and no one doubts the reality of Chaucer's delight in a May morning because it can be proved that when he describes the sunlight upon green and dewy places he is following the lead of other poets, and writing such a landscape passage as the current convention of his art imposed. To take a closer instance, Sidney in his *Astrophel and Stella* series has certainly recorded the phases of an actual passion, yet in the series there is a sonnet to 'Sleep' for which three or four contemporary parallels can be adduced. How then is one to decide where feigning ends, and truth, in the most literal sense, begins? No rules can be laid down; the reader must trust to his own perceptions. And, in the judgment of most critics, just as there is evident in Sidney's sonnets the utterance of a man's thoughts and fancies about the woman whom he loves — an utterance sometimes fanciful, sometimes tender, sometimes

bitter with the cry of thwarted desire — so in Shakespeare's sonnets there is evident the sincerity of passion, sometimes terribly naked. The poet was forty-five when they were published, and even if we admit that the period of their composition lay between his thirtieth and fortieth years, it must be remembered that even at thirty Shakespeare was already old in experience, and that in his latest plays, written before he was fifty, there is the accent of old age rather than of middle life. Thus it is probably with no strained conventionalism that the poet in the sonnets speaks of himself as old, and certainly the love which they express, in so far as it is for a woman, is Antony's rather than Romeo's. But the majority of the sonnets deal with that romantic devotion of mature manhood to a beautiful and honourable youth which is depicted more than once in the plays. Antonio the merchant of Venice, Antonio the sea captain in *Twelfth Night*, are not poets, but they show in act, rather than in word, a passion for Bassanio and for Sebastian not less extreme than is uttered by the poet for the younger man who is addressed in the sonnets. To take these poems, as Mr. Lee does, for the language of flattery towards a patron seems strangely to misconceive their nature. The later group, in which a third person figures, shows the two men tangled in the mesh of a woman whose witchery prevails over that clear knowledge of her nature and that deep sense of degradation in such servitude, which are expressed again and again in the verse.[1]

Much ingenuity has been vainly spent in the attempt to identify the persons of this story ; but it may be taken as a certainty that in the sonnets we are outside the region of invention. Whoever

[1] Even Mr. Lee admits that this later group cannot be regarded as mere imaginative poetry.

is going to read Shakespeare has to face the whole facts of life, and, whether we like it or no, the record of these poems is of a piece with Shakespeare's work. Imagination is of two kinds. The one consists in presenting that which has no counterpart in life (as Spenser did when he described the Red Cross Knight's encounter with the dragon, as Milton did more gloriously in his account of Satan's journey through chaos) so vividly as to suspend the perception of its impossibility. The other consists in taking those common and familiar facts of humanity, the passions, and showing their effect in characters and circumstances so chosen as to display the full beauty and terror of which these familiar forces are capable. That is Shakespeare's method, based on the known, and no man could have brought, as he brought, the whole range of life into his work without a strong experience of the passions. Under the Shakespeare whom his contemporaries picture for us in casual phrases, gentle, urbane, and witty, there must have lain turbulent forces, capable of shaking the man's whole nature, as the men of more limited range, Milton, Scott, Tennyson, for example, were never shaken.

What then we know of Shakespeare in addition to the scanty recorded facts of his life comes to this : that we have evidence in the sonnets of a violent emotional strife through which he passed in middle life ; and, further, that from the body of his plays as a whole, though they present no single character or situation which can be taken as autobiographic, emerges a broad perception of his personality. We know Shakespeare by his outlook on life, and we can trace that outlook in its different phases.

The first of his plays is, by general consent, *Love's Labour's Lost*, which stands in a class by

itself, being a satire on a local and contemporary affectation, the fantastic pastoralism of Sidney's *Arcadia*. It has the sharp, hard cleverness of a very young man. Next come (in Mr. Lee's list, which may be accepted as nearest certainty) the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, a slight and pretty comedy (much more human and less intellectual than its predecessor), and the *Comedy of Errors*, a broad farce. Then in 1592 we reach *Romeo and Juliet*. Nothing in Shakespeare is more beautiful, and it breathes the very spirit of youth. But Shakespeare was eight and twenty when he wrote it, and already the spirit of middle age stands looking through the author's eyes at the madness of lovers. Mercutio is the first of a long list of similar characters, all of them added by Shakespeare to his borrowed stories, and all of them essentially humorists and lookers-on, though interwoven with the action. Mercutio dies indeed, that you may see how a man can die with humour.

Mer. No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve; ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man. I am peppered, I warrant, for this world. A plague o' both your houses. 'Zounds, a dog, a rat, a mouse, a cat, to scratch a man to death, a braggart, a rogue, a villain, that fights by the book of arithmetic! Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm.

But, broadly speaking, in the plays before *Hamlet* the humorous scenes are kept apart from tragic issues; later, humour interpenetrates and blends with the very blackness of tragedy itself.

After *Romeo and Juliet* comes a great series of chronicle plays; first, the three parts of *Henry VI.*, in which Shakespeare is only seen as the reviser of other men's work; then the two *Richards* and *King John*, written in discipleship to Marlowe. In 1593 also is placed *Titus Andronicus*, probably a

revision, and only in part Shakesperian, but still recalling Marlowe. In 1594, perhaps before *John* was finished, begins the wonderful series of romantic comedies with *The Merchant of Venice*, *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* follow in quick succession ; and then the years from 1595 to 1598 are taken up with the still greater achievement of *Henry IV.* and *Henry V.*, historical plays differentiated sharply from those which came before by the importance of the comic element. They are leavened with Falstaff's laughter.

In the middle of this period comes a comedy or farce standing in a class by itself, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* — a play written to order. Elizabeth, like everyone else in London probably, was enchanted with the fat knight, and Elizabeth demanded to see Falstaff in love. She could command the play, but she could not command the artist's invention : Falstaff of the *Merry Wives* is not the Falstaff who dominates both parts of *Henry IV.*, though not so as to eclipse the Prince's admirable figure ; and who is, up to 1600, Shakespeare's most characteristic achievement. For the most characteristic attribute of Shakespeare, at least on the masculine side of his nature, is humour, and Falstaff is the comic spirit incarnate in a vast of flesh.

It is necessary, if we are to talk about Shakespeare at all, to realise something of what is meant by humour. Humour, however indefinable, is certainly a complex habit of mind which involves always a double vision — a reference from the accepted standards to a sense of proportion which is private and personal. It can laugh when the world laughs ; for instance, Falstaff the paunchy knight "larding the lean earth as he walks along,"

is laughable enough when he sweats across the field of battle. But this is not the mirth dearest to the humorist; it finds too large an outlet in laughter; it does not hang about the brain, inextricable from the processes of thought. For, as tears help to an assuaging of grief, so in a sense laughter makes an end of mirth, and the true humour of Falstaff in battle shows itself when he stands by the hacked body of Sir Walter Blunt. "There's honour for you! here's no vanity!" The humorist has no craving for "such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath"; to him "the better part of valour is discretion." So far you laugh with Falstaff, and laugh at him; that is the comic humour. But push the process a little farther, see all life through this vision with the double focus, and you come upon that strange blending of tears and laughter, in thoughts which lie too deep for either, which is the true Shakespearian humour. And it is notable that the first place where this faculty reaches its full range is in the description of Falstaff's death.

Bard. Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or hell.

Host. Nay, sure, he's not in hell: he's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. A' made a finer end and went away an it had been any christom child; a' parted even just between twelve and one, even at the turning o' the tide: for after I saw him fumble with the sheets and play with flowers and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and a' babbled of green fields. "How now, Sir John," quoth I: "what man, be o' good cheer." So a' cried out, "God, God, God," three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, *bid him a' should not think of God; I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet.*

Such a faculty is not indeed inconsistent with the heroic character, and Prince Hal never loses it, not even on the throne. Nor are any of Shakespeare's personages destitute of humour, except

those like Dogberry or Polonius, specially created to be made laughable by lack of it. But the man who is humorist first and last, who can never see with the single eye, has a strange rôle when Fate casts him for the heroic part; and that is the case of Hamlet. A little thought will show that Falstaff and Hamlet are near of kin, nearer perhaps than any two characters in Shakespeare; and each of them is in his own way the man born to be looker-on and commentator at the spectacle of life. It is, perhaps, more than a fancy to say that in these two personations we come nearer than elsewhere to a presentment of Shakespeare himself; and that the plays might have been written by Hamlet and Falstaff in collaboration. At all events, once Hamlet has been created, the jester and the tragedian may at times separate, but they are never far apart; and for the very highest effects they operate together. Lear in the hovel, apostrophising the joint stool which stands to him for Goneril, might move laughter if pity were less urgent; it is the last touch of tragedy when sorrow grows grotesque.

Hamlet was not the first of the plays in which the dramatist changed his attitude towards the world. After *Henry V.* came a return to the "bird-haunted places" of Shakespeare's invention, thickets alive with song. He wrote in two years *Much Ado*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and then turned his hand to a very different theme — to the austere tragedy of *Julius Caesar*, the only one of his plays, apart from the English chronicles, in which love is no leading force. Then in 1602 came *Hamlet*, followed in 1603 by *Troilus and Cressida*; in 1604 *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*, in 1606 *Macbeth*, *Lear* in 1607, in 1608 *Timon of Athens* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. 1609 closes the series at once of tragedies and historical plays with *Coriolanus*.

It will be seen that the turn of the century, coming with Shakespeare's thirty-seventh year, marks an extraordinary change. Brightness is the characteristic of his earlier work ; even in the savage chronicle plays modelled on Marlowe, one feels a buoyancy of temperament ; and the single instance where a tragic theme is chosen from the region of invention not of annals is that of *Romeo and Juliet*, — a tragedy which is neither more or less than the triumphal march of love. Youth and beauty, after a brief hour of felicity, but with a faith that takes confident hold on eternity, are struck down from outside. In themselves is nothing but what should make for happiness ; and deprived of each other they put an end to life. Very different are the tragedies conceived by the mature man. Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Macbeth, fall each by the vice of their own nature : Hamlet through a weakness of the will, Othello though jealous madness, Lear through egoism, Macbeth through ambition. And the preoccupation with tragedy is not exclusive during this period ; were it so, one might attribute the transformation merely to a change in popular taste. The two other plays, *Troilus and Cressida* and *Measure for Measure*, only seem to accentuate the gloom. The latter is the only one of Shakespeare's comedies which fails to achieve a general harmony of tone. Containing some of his noblest work, it remains as a whole dissonant, imperfect, and even perfunctory. But *Troilus and Cressida* stands alone in Shakespeare by its attitude to woman. Cressida is the incarnate wanton, breeding only evil, and in so depicting her Shakespeare departs entirely from his models, for Chaucer made her lovable though frail. To read this play is to realise, by its abnormality, what part woman plays in Shakespeare's conception of the universe.

It is no less than the noblest and the most human that literature or experience can show. Woman here is not the creature of chivalry, part angel, part Athene, whom Dante made imperishable ; she stands on no pedestal, she has her full share of flesh and blood. Her nature is more single, more finely tempered, than man's mixed clay; she stands for constancy against his variableness, for self-sacrifice against his self-seeking. Even cruel, like the fierce queens of the historical plays, or like Lady Macbeth, her cruelty, her ambition, and her revenge are expressions of self-devotion. There are of course women of the commonalty, treated in another spirit — Dame Quickly and her crew, and the gossips of Windsor who fooled the fat knight. But one has to read the literature from Chaucer down to Wycherly to see how Shakespeare stands apart in this matter, how constantly lenient when not chivalrous is his attitude towards the sex. Even in *Lear* when he depicts Goneril the hardest, and Regan the most detestable, of women ever seen on the stage, he only relieves by their blackness Cordelia's lovely virtue. Cleopatra has no virtues, and yet the splendour of her end redeems her. Only in *Troilus and Cressida* is woman treated with a bitter contempt.

Now, in the early group of plays the central beauty of the picture, again and again repeated, is the exquisite figure of a woman, the central motive is the lovely quality of a woman's love for a man. The heroines outshine the heroes by far. Juliet is of finer stuff than Romeo, Portia than Bassanio, Beatrice than Benedick, and Hero how infinitely above Claudio, though Shakespeare does not scruple to reward the undeserving beyond his deserts. In the chronicle plays, women figure mainly as actors in the great jostle of kings and queens, dukes and

duchesses, though in these Shakespeare has found room to portray maternal love both at its tenderest and fiercest in defence of offspring. *Julius Caesar*, in its Roman severity, stands curiously aloof from his other work at the opening of his second period, as does *Coriolanus* at the close ; and in these two dramas women play a small, in *Julius Caesar* almost a negligible, part — admirable though the figure of Portia is in her brief intervention.

But once we embark with *Hamlet* on the group of tragedies, woman figures in a very different aspect. She is no longer the source of strength, but of weakness. Hamlet's mother is detected in double sin: Ophelia, at her father's bidding, will play the spy on her lover, though Shakespeare has not the heart to blame her. *Troilus and Cressida* followed, and more than made amends for this leniency. Next came *Othello*, with the tragic outcome of Desdemona's frightened equivocation : the stronger falls by defect of the weaker nature. In *Measure for Measure* we find the dramatist turning back for a moment to the play with a happy ending, and again the happy ending is achieved through a woman's purity and constancy. Yet the radiation of beauty and goodness which spread itself through so ugly a tale as that of *Much Ado* here is not felt ; and it is the only comedy in Shakespeare which seems designed for a tragic ending. In *Macbeth* woman is the cause of all the evil ; in *Lear* Goneril's and Regan's wickedness outdoes by far the wickedness of man. But so does Cordelia excel in goodness ; and the culminating point in Shakespeare's tragedy is reached when a woman's proven loyalty is powerless to set wrong right.

And yet, perhaps, this is to underrate Cordelia. We depart from reading *Lear* without depression. Only *Troilus and Cressida*, the one play

where woman is wholly condemned, fails to leave in the mind that exhilaration which comes of the highest art. In *Hamlet* the clean sword stroke at the end, which kills Claudius beside his dying queen, clears the air, and the triumphal entry of Fortinbras sweeps away mists with the blast of his bugles. In the blackest of the tragedies, in *Othello*, even in *Lear*, though human beings struggle, and in struggling more deeply involve themselves, like flies in a web, still there results a sense of something that triumphs over time and fate — Desdemona's splendid falsehood, Kent's utterance over Lear's breathless body :

> Vex not his ghost: O, let him pass! he hates him
> That would upon the rack of this tough world
> Stretch him out longer.

And though Cleopatra, in the last tragedy where woman figures as cause of evil, is a kind of Circe, changing Antony into the "doting mallard," who follows her flying sail from the fight at Actium, yet when she lays the asp like a baby to her breast she is assuredly seen in all charity. In *Coriolanus*, where no love-interest enters, the mother and wife of the hero save his fame if not his life, and there are not many figures more charming than Volumnia, "my gracious silence."

But it is upon the women of his latest plays, in the exquisite comedies of *Cymbeline* and *A Winter's Tale*, and the fantasia of *The Tempest*, that Shakespeare has been most prodigal of beauty. If the dew of the morning is on Juliet, these have the dew of eve. Imogen and Hermione, the matrons so lovely in their forgiveness of men who without cause believed the evil — Perdita and Miranda, the girls just trembling on the precipitation into love, — these are figures drawn in cooler, softer tints than those earlier paragons. Less witty, less

audacious, than Beatrice or Rosalind, they are stronger than Desdemona and Ophelia, their rivals in soft charm. It would be a hard choice to decide between Juliet and Miranda, Imogen and Desdemona; but outside Shakespeare literature can show nothing to compare with any of them.

To this group of the poet's latest works — the comedies in which beauty predominates over wit — probably belonged the lost play *Cardenio*. It is mentioned as work done in collaboration with Fletcher. *Henry VIII.*, the last of all the plays, which was being acted in 1613 when the Globe Theatre was burnt down, is generally allowed to contain the work of more hands than one, and certainly has passages in Fletcher's manner, including some of the most famous. Observe, for instance, the cadence of Wolsey's speech to Cromwell:

> *Wol.* Cromwell, I did not think to shed a tear
> In all my miseries; but thou hast forced me,
> Out of thy honest truth, to play the woman.
> Let's dry our eyes: and thus far hear me, Cromwell;
> And, when I am forgotten, as I shall be,
> And sleep in dull cold marble, where no mention
> Of me more must be heard of, say, I taught thee,
> Say, Wolsey, that once trod the ways of glory,
> And sounded all the depths and shoals of honour,
> Found thee a way, out of his wreck, to rise in;
> A sure and safe one, though thy master miss'd it.

Contrast with that the rhythms of Queen Katharine's pleading:

> *Q. Kath.* My lord, my lord,
> I am a simple woman, much too weak
> To oppose your cunning. You're meek and humble-mouth'd;
> You sign your place and calling, in full seeming,
> With meekness and humility; but your heart
> Is cramm'd with arrogancy, spleen, and pride.
> You have, by fortune and his highness' favours,
> Gone slightly o'er low steps and now are mounted
> Where powers are your retainers, and your words,

> Domestics to you, serve your will as 't please
> Yourself pronounce their office. I must tell you,
> You tender more your person's honour than
> Your high profession spiritual: that again
> I do refuse you for my judge; and here,
> Before you all, appeal unto the pope,
> To bring my whole cause 'fore his holiness
> And to be judged by him.

The characteristic of the former passage is the weak or 'feminine' ending with a word whose accent falls on the penultimate syllable, and with a stress so distributed that a pause is inevitable at the completion of the line. In Katharine's speech, line leaps into line; the pause is infinitely varied, so that not a single verse in the whole can be cited in isolation, and hardly even a couplet. In a word, Shakespeare is composing not by lines, but by metrical sentences or groups of lines, the whole of which groups are compacted together into one paragraph. This, however, is not the manner of all his plays — it is the method of his matured art. From his earliest plays to the latest there can be traced a steady progression toward greater freedom in his use of the dramatic verse; and the essential points of this progress can be stated as follows. Rhyme at first largely used for ornament, gradually diminishes in frequency (at one stage being used only to finish off a long speech as if with a hammer stroke), and finally disappears. The natural tendency to make sense and line end together is gradually overcome, till in the latest plays a word incapable of carrying stress is often the last of a verse, as in

> You tender more your person's honour than
> Your high profession spiritual.

Extra syllables are often added to the normal ten — first in the simple weak ending,

> You sign your place and fortune in full seeming,

but then with much bolder irregularity, as in the line:

To oppose your cunning — you're meek and humblemouthed.

where the normal scansion is

Oppose your cunning. Meek and humble mouth'd.

Here in the first foot the light syllable 'to' is half elided; and after the strong pause, closing in a weak ending, the verse begins again with a syllable 'you're,' which is long indeed, but requires no rhetorical weight; the effect being to force a heavy stress on the emphatic word 'meek.' By such devices Shakespeare, who began with a close formal adherence to the artificial rhythm, made of his verse something which reconciled that half-veiled recurrence, which the ear is trained to demand, with the varying colour and the shifting cadences of intelligent speech. And since it is impossible to illustrate by quotations his dramatic art, for that art consists in the presentment of living persons, shaping and being shaped by one another in the collision of will with other wills or external forces, it is well to cite a few extracts showing the development of Shakespeare's metrical art. Here is first of all Biron's protest against the rules of the "little Academe," in which the King of Navarre (like Tennyson's Princess) has shut up himself and his courtiers:

Biron. I can but say their protestation over;
So much, dear liege, I have already sworn,
That is, to live and study here three years.
But there are other strict observances;
As, not to see a woman in that term,
Which I hope well is not enrolled there;
And one day in a week to touch no food
And but one meal on every day beside,
The which I hope is not enrolled there;
And then, to sleep but three hours in the night,
And not be seen to wink of all the day —

When I was wont to think no harm all night
And make a dark night too of half the day —
Which I hope well is not enrolled there:
O, these are barren tasks, too hard to keep,
Not to see ladies, study, fast, not sleep.
King. Your oath is pass'd to pass away from these.
Biron. Let me say no, my liege, and if you please;
I only swore to study with your grace
And stay here in your court for three years' space.
Long. You swore to that, Biron, and to the rest.
Biron. By yea and nay, sir, then I swore in jest.
What is the end of study? let me know.
King. Why, that to know, which else we should not know.
Biron. Things hid and barr'd, you mean, from common sense?
King. Ay, that is study's god-like recompense.
Biron. Come on, then; I will swear to study so,
To know the thing I am forbid to know;
As thus, — to study where I well may dine,
When I to feast expressly am forbid;
Or study where to meet some mistress fine,
When mistresses from common sense are hid:
Or having sworn too hard a keeping oath,
Study to break it and not break my troth.

It will be noticed that in one place Biron rhymes in quatrains, and several speeches in the play nearly conform to the model of the Shakespearian sonnet — three quatrains rhyming alternately followed by a couplet. In *Romeo and Juliet* rhyme figures largely, but by no means to this extent, and it is used, as a rule, when Shakespeare mistrusted his matter. What Friar Laurence has to say is not always of great interest, and he is apt to say it in rhymed verse. But consider this lovely passage:

Jul. Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face,
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak to-night.
Fain would I dwell on form, fain, fain deny
What I have spoke: but farewell compliment!
Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say 'Ay'
And I will take thy word: yet, if thou swear'st,
Thou mayst prove false; at lovers' perjuries,

They say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully:
Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won,
I'll frown and be perverse and say thee nay,
So thou wilt woo: but else, not for the world.
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
And therefore thou mayst think my 'haviour light:
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
I should have been more strange, I must confess
But that thou overheard'st, ere I was ware,
My true love's passion: therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night hath so discovered.

Rom. Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—

Jul. O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

Rom. What shall I swear by?

Jul. Do not swear at all;
Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
Which is the god of my idolatry,
And I'll believe thee.

Rom. If my heart's dear love—

Jul. Well, do not swear: although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract to-night:
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden:
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say 'It lightens.' Sweet, good night!
This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.
Good night, good night! as sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart as that within my breast!

Rom. O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied!

Jul. What satisfaction canst thou have to-night?

Rom. The exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine.

Jul. I gave thee mine before thou didst request it:
And yet I would it were to give again.

Rom. Wouldst thou withdraw it? for what purpose, love?

Jul. But to be frank, and give it thee again;
And yet I wish but for the thing I have:
My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite.

[*Nurse calls within.*

I hear some noise within; dear love, adieu!
Anon, good nurse! Sweet Montague, be true.
Stay but a little, I will come again.

Here the rhyme is only used to mark a break in the scene, as nearly every exit throughout the play is marked: for Juliet has turned to go and runs back with her after-thought:

Stay but a little, I will come again.

Notice, however, first, that only three lines in the whole passage depart from the strict ten-syllable measure, and these are simple cases of the double or weak-ending, as in

Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

And secondly, that every line closes with a break in the sense, a grammatical pause. Compare with this the wonderful description of death's terror with which Claudio urges Isabel to sell her honour for his life:

Claud. Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery clouds, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
Of those that lawless and incertain thought
Imagine howling: 'tis too horrible!
The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
Can lay on nature is a paradise
To what we fear of death.

Here the breaking of sentences by lines into detachable units has wholly disappeared, but the verse still modifies very little the decasyllabic iambic formula. And upon the whole, from first to last, Shakespeare never went far from it. His verse is always easy to read, the rhythm easy to follow. Yet here is a

passage from *The Tempest* which defies the footrule. When animated narrative rather than the expression of poetic thought or emotion is needed, Shakespeare varies his verse, till the bad actor has little trouble to conceal the fact that it is metre, and the good can bring out its full melody without sacrificing any of the play of emphasis. Ariel enters to report to his employer, the magician Prospero, now at last ready to be avenged on his treacherous brother :

Ari. All hail, great master! grave sir, hail! I come
To answer thy best pleasure; be 't to fly,
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride
On the curl'd clouds, to thy strong bidding task
Ariel and all his quality.
Pros. Hast thou, spirit,
Perform'd to point the tempest that I bade thee?
Ari. To every article.
I boarded the king's ship; now on the beak,
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
I flamed amazement: sometime I'ld divide,
And burn in many places; on the topmast,
The yards and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,
Then meet and join. Jove's lightnings, the precursors
O' the dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary
And sight-outrunning were not; the fire and cracks
Of sulphurous roaring the most mighty Neptune
Seem to besiege and make his bold waves tremble,
Yea, his dread trident shake.
Pros. My brave spirit!
Who was so firm, so constant, that this coil
Would not infect his reason?
Ari. Not a soul
But felt a fever of the mad and play'd
Some tricks of desperation. All but mariners
Plunged in the foaming brine and quit the vessel,
Then all afire with me: the king's son, Ferdinand,
With hair up-staring, — then like reeds, not hair, —
Was the first man that leap'd; cried, 'Hell is empty,
And all the devils are here.'
Pros. Why, that's my spirit!
But was not this nigh shore?
Ari. Close by, my master:

Pros. But are they, Ariel, safe?
Ari. Not a hair perish'd:
On their sustaining garments not a blemish,
But fresher than before: and, as thou badest me,
In troops I have dispersed them 'bout the isle.
The king's son have I landed by himself;
Whom I left cooling of the air with sighs
In an odd angle of the isle and sitting,
His arms in this sad knot.
Pros. Of the king's ship
The mariners say how thou hast disposed
And all the rest o' the fleet.
Ari. Safely in harbour
Is the king's ship: in the deep nook, where once
Thou call'dst me up at midnight to fetch dew
From the still-vex'd Bermoothes, there she's hid:
The mariners all under hatches stow'd;
Who, with a charm join'd to their suffer'd labour,
I have left asleep: and for the rest o' the fleet
Which I dispersed, they all have met again
And are upon the Mediterranean flote,
Bound sadly home for Naples,
Supposing that they saw the king's ship wreck'd
And his great person perish.

One more extract may be given from *Pericles*, a play not included in the Folio of 1623. A quarto was issued in 1608 assigning it to Shakespeare, but much of it is plainly by some inferior artist. He probably rehandled, after his early fashion, a play already written, and added to it such passages as this, where the Prince of Tyre is about to cast overboard in a storm the body of his wife who has just died, or seemed to die, in giving birth to a daughter.

Per. A terrible childbed hast thou had my dear;
No light, no fire: the unfriendly elements
Forgot thee utterly; nor have I time
To give thee hallow'd to thy grave, but straight
Must cast thee, scarcely coffin'd, in the ooze;
Where, for a monument upon thy bones,
And e'er-remaining lamps, the belching whale
And humming water must o'erwhelm thy corpse,
Lying with simple shells.

It is possible that Shakespeare's first intention in *Pericles* may have been to rewrite the whole. We know little of his procedure. But we know this, that he never wrote a play whose plot was constructed wholly from invention. Sometimes he found an episode in history (derived from the picturesque uncritical histories, such as Holinshed, or, for the Roman plays, Plutarch in North's translation), sometimes in fiction, as when he constructed the pastoral comedy of *As You Like It*, from Lodge's prose romance, *Rosalynd*. But frequently he was drawn to a subject by the fact that a play had been already made upon it, as was the case with *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Lear*. It was never his talent to invent things that might have happened; but rather to show in the case of certain events which had happened, or were represented as having happened, to show how the actors in these events spoke, thought, felt, and behaved. Often, indeed, he blended two stories into one; thus, in the *Merchant of Venice* there is one tale of the princess whose hand had to be won by a choice among caskets, and another of the usurer who covenanted for a pound of flesh. Shakespeare united the interests by making Bassanio, in need for money to set out on the adventure of the caskets, come to his friend, who, for Bassanio's sake, signs this covenant; and by making Portia, the lady of the caskets, come in masquerade to enact the lawyer, whose subtlety defeats the Jew. Again, in *Lear*, to the story of the king with three daughters which is found in one source, is united the story of the nobleman with two sons; and Shakespeare welds the two inextricably by giving the bastard Edmund for a lover both to Goneril and Regan, and Edgar, the

loyal exiled son, for a guide to Lear in his outcast madness.

It must be said, however, that in his handling of the plots thus taken, Shakespeare is often careless and even slovenly. Nor did he advance in this respect. *Cymbeline*, one of the latest plays, is of the worst constructed. It must always be remembered also that the problem of dramatic construction was then quite other than it is now, for the stage of that day had no scenery, and consequently constant change of scene had in it nothing undesirable. Dramatist and actors only sought to represent the human element of each scene, and left the audience to imagine an appropriate setting. Thus, moving constantly under conditions that forbade all attempt at mechanical illusion, Shakespeare was perhaps tempted unduly to disregard verisimilitude in conduct, and to accept any version of a story that would afford effective moments for dialogue. Claudio's action, for instance, in *Much Ado* is not only unworthy, but incredible.

Certain repetitions may also be assigned to causes inherent in the nature of Shakespeare's stage. When we remember that every woman's part was then acted by a boy, it is not hard to understand his liking for a heroine in doublet and hose. The essential thing, however, is to realise that the plays were written to be acted, but written for an audience which had few books, and little habit of reading; which was trained therefore to take in literature by the ear rather than through the eye ; which did not regard poetry, as we have somehow come to regard it, as a thing to be enjoyed in seclusion, but which, on the other hand, always needed to be propitiated with an admixture in the highest poetry of lighter stuff. It is this close touch with the groundlings which makes the

Elizabethan drama what the novel came to be in the nineteenth century — the completest expression of the national mind. Shakespeare, who borrowed all his plots, is the least derivative of all great poets; he springs like an oak tree from the soil; and he seems to include the whole range of English life in his day. Contrast him with men like Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley, or Byron, and you will find that each of these wrote primarily to express his own personality, and is therefore in touch with only a very limited part of life. But Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray wrote deliberately for an audience, with the thought of that audience, what it would like, and what it would understand, in their minds. Every artist seeks as it were an echo of his own thought, but the popular artists seem expectant of the echo. It is Shakespeare's glory that from the great instrument he played on he drew forth the widest range of response; there seems no thought so obscure, no feeling so rare, whether by its excess of delicacy or its maddening vehemence, but he can convey it to all humanity, and set the least accessible strings, in minds stiffened or slack, vibrating in unison with his stroke on the chords of his own heart.

CHAPTER IV

BEN JONSON AND HERRICK

It must always be borne in mind that Shakespeare is only the greatest in a group of great writers, whom he resembles in kind, but surpasses in degree. In a sense his greatness does them a wrong, for if the ordinary student of English literature in general has made himself familiar with thirty-seven specimens of the Elizabethan drama, he has done perhaps as much as is exigent; and it would be hard to advise that some of Shakespeare should be left unread to make room for a study of his contemporaries. Yet there were several contemporaries whose work at its best approached the Shakespearian measure. Their work has not the historic importance of Marlowe's, for they were not Shakespeare's models; nor on the whole can any of them be put quite on a level with that great forerunner. But they wrote when the dramatic art was better understood, and they were better dramatists than Marlowe. Webster in two plays, *The White Devil*, and *The Duchess of Malfy*, reached a height of tragic intensity only surpassed by Shakespeare. The latter of these dramas held the stage for long, and a single line of it is often quoted for its

marvellous suggestion of beauty and terror. The Duchess, young and virtuous, has loved and married a man beneath her rank, one of her own household; and for this, her only offence, she has been done to death with horrible torments by her brother. And that brother, standing over her dead beauty and innocence, speaks only in these words his spasm of remorse:

> Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle: she died young.

More famous in their own day than Webster, and by far more prolific, were the friends Beaumont and Fletcher, most of whose work was done in collaboration. Men of good birth, courtiers by rank and inclination, they "imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better," says Dryden in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, than their less fortunate forerunners. "I am apt to believe," he goes on, "that the English language in them arrived to its highest perfection; what words have been since taken in are rather superfluous than necessary. Their plays are now the most pleasant and frequent entertainments of the stage, two of theirs being acted through the year for one of Shakespeare's or Jonson's." This was written in 1667; but it cannot be said that their vogue outlasted the seventeenth century; and admirable though their plays are to read, neither the *Maid's Tragedy* nor *Philaster* impresses a reader to-day as does Webster at his best. The play *Two Noble Kinsmen*, based on Chaucer's tale of *Palamon and Arcite*, was included in the folio edition of their works, but may probably owe its best passages to Shakespeare; at its first publication it was assigned to him and Fletcher jointly.

Although the name 'Elizabethan' is loosely given to this whole group of dramatists, Beaumont

and Fletcher belong to the Stuart period: they began to write under James I. So did Massinger, another copious dramatist, one of whose plays outlasted any of theirs on the stage. His comedy, *A New Way to pay Old Debts*, was acted steadily up to the Victorian era and the dawn of modern comedy; the central figure in it, Sir Giles Overreach, giving to an actor superb chances in the presentment of this arrogant, unscrupulous, and masterful wielder of wealth. Later still than Massinger comes John Ford, whose *Broken Heart*, although marked with decadence, is a work of real beauty and pathos.

But, by the consent of his own and all later times, the figure next to Shakespeare in this group is that of Ben Jonson, who has odd affinities with his namesake of the eighteenth century, in his rough yet attractive personality, his strong critical faculty, and his exercise of a literary dictatorship. Jonson was of plebeian origin, but got a good schooling at Westminster, though it is said he worked as a bricklayer before he went to serve in the army that fought in the Netherlands. He returned to London and took to literature for a livelihood, which meant writing plays. It is said that Shakespeare, nine years his senior, and now established in prosperity, befriended the young author, and secured the production of Jonson's first comedy by his own company. This play, *Every Man in his Humour*, marked a new fashion in drama. The playwright's primary object was no longer to tell a story by dialogue and action, but to exhibit peculiarities of character. Each personage has a certain humour or foible: old Knowell's is parental interference with a son, Kitely's is marital jealousy, Captain Bobadill's a cowardly braggadocio, and so on; and whatever each does

illustrates his besetting propensity. The pivot of the action is Kitely's jealousy, and it will be seen that Jonson's method differs from Shakespeare's in this: that we see in Shakespeare's plays a man in whose character jealousy works, while in Jonson we see the man wholly made up of jealousy. The plot is ingeniously constructed, so that the actions prompted by the various humours lead to collisions between the characters; the swaggering captain meets the choleric old gentleman, a drubbing naturally results, and so on. But the total effect produced is that of gross improbability. It is evident that Jonson does not for a moment believe in the reality of his story; what he does believe in is the reality of the 'humour' displayed. His second comedy, *Every Man Out of his Humour*, opened with a kind of prefatory dialogue, in which the author through the mouth of one character explained his theory. First, he made it clear that what he studied was not merely a superficial eccentricity, and he resented the use of the term 'humour' as meaning merely a fad or fashion. Rather,

> When some one peculiar quality
> Doth so possess a man that it doth draw
> All his affects, his spirits, and his powers
> In their confluctions all to run one way,
> This may be truly said to be a humour.

What interested him was the abnormal; and he invited his audience to

> See the time's deformity
> Anatomised in every nerve and sinew.

Here, then, we have the appearance (commonly a sign of decadence) of a self-conscious, theorising art. Jonson's appeal was to the intellect, not to the emotions; his work lay nearer to prose than that of Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, and

the rest; he neglected the love interest; he lacked their tone of romance; he repressed the lyrical vein which with them breaks out again and again in the midst of pure comedy, as for instance in Mercutio's description of Queen Mab. He attempted, moreover, to alter the conventions of the art; to impose the unity of time, confining the action after the Greek model to a period of four and twenty hours, and the unity of place, scoffing at the bold Elizabethan fashion of leaping over seas and continents. In perhaps the best of all his plays, *The Alchemist*, the action passes in one house and within the time needed to play it. He takes a pack of rogues — Face, the servant left by his master in charge of a house, and his two associates, Subtle, the alchemist and fortune-teller, and Mistress Dol Common — and he shows the different types of persons who come to be gulled by their quackery, from Sir Epicure Mammon, the covetous rich sensualist in quest of the philosopher's stone, to Abel Drugger, the little tobacconist, anxious for instructions how to succeed with his new shop. The first scene with Drugger may be quoted, and anyone who reflects will see why Garrick chose this small but effective part.

Subtle. What is your name, say you, Abel Drugger?
Drug. Yes, Sir.
Sub. A seller of tobacco?
Drug. Yes, Sir.
Sub. Umph!
Free of the grocers?
Drug. Ay, an 't please you?
Sub. Well ——
Your business, Abel?
Drug. This, an 't please your worship;
I am a young beginner, and am building
Of a new shop, an 't like your worship, just
At corner of a street: — Here is the plot on 't —
And I would know by art, Sir, of your worship,

Which way I would make my door, by necromancy,
And where my shelves; and which should be for boxes,
And which for pots. I would be glad to thrive, Sir;
And I was wish'd to your worship by a gentleman,
One Captain Face, that says you know men's planets,
And their good angels, and their bad.
Sub. I do,
If I do see them ——

Re-enter FACE.

Face. What! my honest Abel?
Thou art well met here.
Drug. Troth, Sir, I was speaking,
Just as your worship came here, of your worship:
I pray you speak for me to master doctor.
Face. He shall do anything. — Doctor, do you hear?
This is my friend, Abel, an honest fellow;
He lets me have good tobacco, and he does not
Sophisticate it with sack-lees or oil,
Nor washes it in muscadel and grains,
Nor buries it in gravel, under ground,
Wrapp'd up in greasy leather, or piss'd clouts:
But keeps it in fine lily pots, that, open'd,
Smell like conserve of roses, or French beans.
He has his maple block, his silver tongs,
Winchester pipes, and fire of Juniper:
A neat, spruce, honest fellow, and no goldsmith.
Sub. He is a fortunate fellow, that I am sure on.

One may quote also a few lines from Sir Epicure Mammon's voluptuous forecast of what the philosopher's stone will bring him:

We will be brave, Puffe, now we have the medicine.
My meat shall all come in, in Indian shells,
Dishes of agate set in gold, and studded
With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths, and rubies,
The tongues of carps, dormice, and camels' heels,
Boil'd in the spirit of sol, and dissolv'd pearl,
Apicius' diet, 'gainst the epilepsy:
And I will eat these broths with spoons of amber,
Headed with diamond and carbuncle.
My foot-boy shall eat pheasants, calver'd salmons,
Knots, godwits, lampreys: I my self will have
The beards of barbels served, instead of sallads;

Oil'd mushrooms ; and the swelling unctuous paps
Of a fat pregnant sow, newly cut off,
Drest with an exquisite and poignant sauce;
For which I'll say unto my cook, *There's gold,*
Go forth, and be a knight.

As the first of these extracts shows Jonson's skill in devising situations and characters so effective on the stage that his plays held their own for two centuries; so the second shows the kind of poetry not without splendour, but wholly without the lyrical note, which Jonson contrived to weave into his fabric.

And yet Jonson was by no means lacking in that lyrical gift which is a main characteristic of his period. The songs which lie through Shakespeare's plays, poetry within poetry, jewels set in gold, are only the loveliest examples in a store to which many known and many unknown poets contributed exquisite things that have come down to us in the plays and songbooks of that time. Beaumont and Fletcher are perhaps the richest of the playwrights after Shakespeare, yet lesser men, such as Greene and Dekker, have written songs not less beautiful even than these two lyrics, which are probably Fletcher's:

Lay a garland on my hearse
Of the dismal yew;
Maidens, willow branches bear;
Say, I died true.

My love was false, but I was firm
From my hour of birth.
Upon my buried body lie
Lightly, gentle earth!

Weep no more, nor sigh, nor groan;
Sorrow calls no time that's gone;
Violets plucked the sweetest rain
Makes not fresh nor grow again;
Trim thy locks, look cheerfully;
Fate's hid ends eyes cannot see;

Joys as wingèd dreams fly past,
Why should sadness longer last?
Grief is but a wound to woe;
Gentlest fair, mourn, mourn no mo.

Nor is there any lack of the other, and perhaps higher, kind of lyrical poetry, of which Shakespeare's sonnets offer superb examples — that statelier music, nearer akin to speech than to song, which transfuses with emotion a volume of thought, rather than finds expression, as do Shakespeare's bird-like songs, for simple feeling. Just as the stanzas already quoted from the *Maid's Tragedy* are akin to the song in *Twelfth Night*, "Come away, come away, Death," so there is affinity between many of Shakespeare's sonnets and Beaumont's *Lines on the Tombs in Westminster Abbey*:

Mortality, behold and fear!
What a change of flesh is here!
Think how many royal bones
Sleep within this heap of stones;
Here they lie had realms and lands,
Who now want strength to stir their hands;
Where from their pulpits seal'd with dust
They preach, 'In greatness is no trust.'
Here's an acre sown indeed
With the richest royall'st seed
That the earth did e'er suck in,
Since the first man died for sin:
Here the bones of birth have cried,
'Though gods they were, as men they died';
Here are sands, ignoble things,
Dropt from the ruin'd sides of kings:
Here's a world of pomp and state,
Buried in dust, once dead by fate.

Ben Jonson also, harsh and rough though his genius showed itself, had on occasion an exquisite gift of song — as is proved by the famous, "Drink to me only with thine eyes," and the even finer *Stanzas to Diana*,

Queen and huntress, chaste and fair.

He was a lyrist, but in the lyric his bent inclined to the severer muse; even in these two songs there is audible an undertone of Horatian reminiscence. However we rank him now, it is clear that as dramatist he had only a qualified contemporary success, but that in his later days he was accepted as the representative poet of his time. No better indication of his position can be found than the primacy given to him twelve years before his death in the Folio edition of Shakespeare; where, in the collection of elegiac poems by writers of the time prefixed to it, his famous lines had as of right the first place.

As an example of his mastery in the short sententious forms of verse, we may give these verses (called a song but very deficient in singing quality), from his well-known comedy, *Epicœne, or The Silent Woman*:

> Still to be neat, still to be drest,
> As you were going to a feast;
> Still to be powdered, still perfumed:
> Lady, it is to be presumed,
> Though art's hid causes are not found,
> All is not sweet, all is not sound.
>
> Give me a look, give me a face,
> That makes simplicity a grace;
> Robes loosely flowing, hair as free:
> Such sweet neglect more taketh me
> Than all the adulteries of art:
> They strike mine eyes, but not my heart.

With this poem before us, we have at once the model for much in the best-known work produced by that group of poets not dramatists, who sat at the feet of the veteran, and declared themselves to be "sealed of the tribe of Ben." These were the young men of culture and fashion; for although Robert Herrick was a country parson in Devonshire, he was a country parson by necessity; his

tastes and interests would have kept him in town in touch with the circle of young cavaliers, of whom Lovelace, Suckling, and Carew have left us imperishable work, though too little in quantity to earn them the title of greatness. Yet Jonson's influence was not felt only among the cavaliers. George Wither, a Puritan and a true poet, was of his following; and Milton's early writings in reality belong to this school.

But Herrick, who was born at Cheapside in 1594, and died at Dean Prior in Devon eighty years later, is undoubtedly the representative poet of the Caroline age. The spirit of his work is the same as that of the courtier dramatists, but it takes a new character with the new mode of expression. Under Elizabeth the drama was a national institution, born of the people, the most truly popular literature that England had known. Under James I. a new class of dramatists began to appear with Beaumont and Fletcher, who, fifteen years earlier, would naturally have belonged to Sidney's group, and would have treated the popular drama with academic contempt. And what was more important, the audiences were changing. Puritanism was a growing force, and Puritanism disapproved of stage plays. The result was that quiet and scrupulous folk stayed away, and the drama, as it grew less popular, grew less simple and more licentious, until finally it ended in disrepute. Jonson's influence was set against it, and he showed the example of writing work that did not depend for success upon the applause of the groundlings. His *Ode to Himself* on the failure of his play, *The New Inn*, in 1629, begins,

> Come, leave the loathèd stage,
> And the more loathsome age;
> Where pride and impudence, in faction knit,
> Usurp the chair of wit!

Indicting and arraigning every day
Something they call a play.
Let their fastidious, vain
Commission of the brain
Run on and rage, sweat, censure, and condemn;
They were not made for thee, less thou for them.

And after three more energetic stanzas of denunciation the poet cries:

Leave things so prostitute,
And take the Alcaic lute;
Or thine own Horace, or Anacreon's lyre.

It was this summons to a new poetry, the lyric muse, that the sons of Ben answered, most of them intermittently, but all of them writing work which appealed to the individual, not to the crowd. And Herrick in his country vicarage touched day by day, certainly not the stern 'Alcaic lute,' but the lyre both of Horace and Anacreon; till in the year 1648 he issued his *Hesperides*, a book containing some 1200 pieces varying "between odes and epithalamia of five or six pages, and epigrams of a single couplet." Here we have a man following consciously Ben Jonson's lead in so far as he copies the forms of the classical lyric poets; but unconsciously nearer to Shakespeare in the spirit of fidelity to nature which animates his whole work. He writes at his best of what he sees and knows — the life of an English countryside, its folk, its beasts, and its flowers. He writes also of those themes which are common to all lyrical poets — large generalisations like the 'shortness of life,' the 'quiet of death,' to which every poet gives his own particular application. The poem to *His Winding-Sheet*, for example, is none the less distinctly Herrick's though the fantastic and grim conceits of the opening recall Donne, the 'metaphysical' poet whose fame then rivalled Jonson's and though the lines

All wise, all equal, and all just
Alike i' th' dust

have an echo of the lovely song in *Cymbeline*:

> Fear no more the heat o' the sun.

Nor is it fanciful to find a hint of Ophelia in the *Mad Maid's Song*:

> Good morrow to the day so fair;
> Good morning, sir, to you;
> Good morrow to mine own torn hair,
> Bedabbled with the dew.
>
> Good morning to this primrose too;
> Good morrow to each maid;
> That will with flowers the tomb bestrew
> Wherein my Love is laid.
>
> Ah! woe is me, woe, woe is me,
> Alack and well-a-day!
> For pity, sir, find out that bee,
> Which bore my Love away.
>
> I'll seek him in your bonnet brave;
> I'll seek him in your eyes;
> Nay, now I think they've made his grave
> I' th' bed of strawberries.
>
> I'll seek him there; I know, ere this,
> The cold, cold earth doth shake him;
> But I will go, or send a kiss
> By you, sir, to awake him.
>
> Pray hurt him not; though he be dead,
> He knows well who do love him;
> And who with green turfs rear his head,
> And who do rudely move him.
>
> He's soft and tender, pray take heed,
> With bands of cowslips bind him,
> And bring him home; — but 'tis decreed
> That I shall never find him.

But, for work more entirely characteristic of this author, one would cite his imitation of Horace's *Epode* in praise of "the country life":

> Sweet country life, to such unknown,
> Whose lives are others, not their own!

But serving courts and cities, be
Less happy, less enjoying thee.
Thou never plough'st the ocean's foam
To seek and bring rough pepper home:
Nor to the Eastern Ind dost rove
To bring from thence the scorchéd clove;
Nor, with the loss of thy loved rest,
Bringst home the ingot from the West.
No, thy ambition's masterpiece
Flies no thought higher than a fleece:
Or how to pay thy hinds, and clear
All scores, and so to end the year:
But walk'st about thine own dear bounds
Not envying others' larger grounds.
For well thou know'st, 'tis not the extent
Of land makes life, but sweet content.
When now the cock (the ploughman's horn)
Calls forth the lily-wristed morn;
Then to thy cornfields thou dost go,
Which though well soil'd, yet thou dost know
That the best compost for the lands
Is the wise master's feet, and hands.
There at the plough thou find'st thy team,
With a hind whistling there to them:
And cheer'st them up, by singing how
The kingdom's portion is the plough.
This done, then to th' enamelled meads
Thou go'st; and as thy foot there treads,
Thou seest a present God-like power
Imprinted in each herb and flower:
And smell'st the breath of great-eyed kine,
Sweet as the blossoms of the vine.
Here thou behold'st thy large sleek neat
Unto the dewlaps up in meat:
And, as thou look'st, the wanton steer,
The heifer, cow, and ox draw near,
To make a pleasing pastime there.
These seen, thou go'st to view thy flocks
Of sheep, safe from the wolf and fox,
And find'st their bellies there as full
Of short, sweet grass, as backs with wool:
And leav'st them, as they feed and fill,
A shepherd piping on a hill.

Observe how Herrick's realism suggests what Horace would scarce have thought of — the lush

pasture of the kine, the "short sweet grass" of the uplands that sheep love.

To these extracts may be added his *Prayer to Ben Jonson*:

When I a verse shall make,
Know I have pray'd thee,
For old religion's sake,
Saint Ben, to aid me.

Make the way smooth for me,
When I, thy Herrick,
Honouring thee on my knee
Offer my Lyric.

Candles I'll give to thee,
And a new altar;
And thou, Saint Ben, shalt be
Writ in my psalter.

Other prayers there are in Herrick, not without beauty, but his sacred poems have never retained a hold on the devotional mind, as have those of his contemporaries, George Herbert and Crashaw — disciples at once of Donne and Ben Jonson. Herrick's paganism — a devout worship of the powers of Nature — lies deeper than his Christianity. But nothing with him lies very deep, least of all his love poems, the best of which are exquisite trifles such as this:

A sweet disorder in the dress
Kindles in clothes a wantonness;
A lawn about the shoulders thrown
Into a fine distraction;
An erring lace, which here and there
Enthrals the crimson stomacher;
A cuff neglectful, and thereby
Ribbons to flow confusedly;
A winning wave, deserving note,
In the tempestuous petticoat;
A careless shoe-string, in whose tie
I see a wild civility; —
Do more bewitch me, than when art
Is too precise in every part.

There is a want of power and passion in the man's nature ; he never reaches such heights as Lovelace achieved in the lyric, "Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind," which needs no quotation, nor as Carew, with whom the language of compliment turns to the glow of flame in the magnificent lyric which opens :

> Ask me no more where Jove bestows,
> When June is past, the faded rose,
> For in thy beauty's orient deep
> These flowers, as in their causes, sleep.

Yet, as Palgrave rightly says, the bulk and the sustained quality of Herrick's work, the variety of his artistic achievement, entitles him to the foremost place among English lyrical poets before the great roll of modern names begins with Burns.

CHAPTER V

BACON

We have said, so far, little of prose; and it is a noticeable fact that in the sixteenth century books of verse were more numerous and popular than those of prose. Certain exceptions have to be noted: Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* and John Lyly's *Euphues* each set a fashion in affectation. The influence of the *Arcadia* in generating a rage for artificial pastorals has been noted; that of Lyly's book is important in literary history. Lyly was the first to give to English prose, brevity, point, sparkle, and a sententious brevity; though he acquired his epigrammatic effects by strange mannerisms, of which the two chief were the constant use of interlocked alliteration, and of illustrations from a fantastic natural history. They are not unfairly illustrated by Falstaff's parody of them.

"Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied; for though *the camomile the more it is trodden on the faster it grows*, yet youth the more it is *w*asted the sooner it *w*ears. — Harry, now I do not speak to thee in drink but in tears, not in *p*leasure but in *p*assion, not in *w*ords only but in *w*oes also."

But if Falstaff parodied Lyly, Shakespeare imitated him ; and the sparkling prose of the comedies owes deep debt to the author of *Euphues and his England.*

For the essential importance of Lyly lies in this, that he was the first writer who conceived of an ornate and sententious English prose which should not be modelled on the Latin. Narrative writing had always imposed on the author a certain simplicity and adherence to the natural idiom of the language ; and from Malory onwards there is plenty of English prose which is delightful to read. But, except Malory's, there is no book of English narrative written before 1600 which the general reader knows ; and out of all the Elizabethan period there is only one book of prose which retains its hold. This is of course the volume of *Essays*, first published by Francis Bacon in 1596. But it should be said at once that Bacon's *Essays*, as we know them, belong really to the reign of James I. They were produced at the same time as the Authorised Version of the Bible, and display the same marvellous power of using the colours of poetry without the convention of metre. But to appreciate Bacon's work technically, it is necessary to look at his sketch of an ideal Commonwealth ; for in the opening chapters, which tell how strayed sailors came to the shore of "New Atlantis," will be found that narrative style, neither modern nor obsolete, which is most familiar to us in the Gospels. The *Essays*, much more laboriously written, are less faithful to the genius of English : they are evidently written by a man trying to keep as near as possible to the Latin idiom ; though the nature of the work, and of Bacon's mind, inclined him to those Latin authors who studied brevity. He is nowhere clogged with the long involved sentences which other writers of

the period before the Restoration copied from a language whose structure lent itself naturally to such elaborations.

Bacon's book of fifty-seven essays is not only the first work in prose at all as well known as the work say of Chaucer ; it is among the best known in the language, for no author is harder to forget. We are not concerned here with Bacon's place in the history of thought ; he holds his place in literature by this one book, for the sake of which the curious read his other productions. But about this book too much cannot be known, and every reader should compare the first edition, consisting of ten essays, with the final form.[1]

Francis Bacon was a son of Sir Nicholas Bacon, Keeper of the Great Seal under Elizabeth, and was therefore born with a silver, if not a gilt, spoon in his mouth. But during Elizabeth's reign he was the courtier and lawyer in quest of a promotion which he did not attain. He attached himself to Essex, but when Essex was impeached, acted as prosecutor of his patron with an energy that men deprecated. The first edition of the *Essays* belongs to this period of his life, and they may accurately be described as a collection of maxims for the guidance of a courtier seeking advancement. Condensation was never carried further : none of the essays in this first form exceeds in length a page of an average book. And in all of them, underlying the astounding wisdom, is the suggestion of a man self-seeking. One may cite that on " Discourse " :

> Some in their discourse desire rather commendation of wit, in being able to holde all arguments, then of Iudgement in discerning what is true : as if it were a praise to knowe what might be saide, and not what should be thought : some haue certaine common places, and theames, wherein they are good,

[1] Both are given in the *Golden Treasury* edition.

and want variety : w^ch^ kinde of Poverty is for the most parte tedious, and now, and then ridiculous : the honorablest parte of talke is to giue the occasion, and againe to moderate, and passe to somewhat else : It is good to vary, and mixe speache of the present occasion w^th^ arguments; tales w^th^ reasons : asking of questions w^th^ telling of opinions : and lest w^th^ earnest : but some thinges are priviledged from lest, namely, Religion, matters of state, greate persons, all mens present busines of Importaunce, and any case that deserveth pitty : He that questioneth much, shall learne much, and content much, especially if he apply his questions to the skill of the party of whom he asketh : for he shall giue them occasion to please themselues in speaking, and himselfe shall continually gather knowledge : if sometimes you dissemble your knowledge of that you are thought to knowe, you shallbe thought another time to knowe, that w^ch^ you knowe not : speache of a mans selfe is not good often ; and there is but one thing wherein a man may commend himselfe w^th^ good grace, and that is commending vertue in another : especially if it be such a vertue as wherevnto himselfe pretendeth : Discretion of speache is more then eloquence, and to speake agreeably to him w^th^ whome we deale, is more then to speake in good wordes, or in good order : a good continued speache, w^th^out a good speache of Interloquution showeth slownes ; and a good second speache w^th^out a good set speache showeth shallownes, to vse to many circumstaunces ere one come to the matter is wearisome, and to vse none at all is blunt.

Under King James Bacon's fortunes mended, and he rose to be Solicitor General. In 1612 a second edition of the *Essays* was issued by him with twenty-nine more added to the first ten. A prefatory dedication to Prince Henry of Wales was written, but the Prince's death stopped its publication ; it may be quoted, however, as showing both Bacon's aim and also the meaning attached by him to the word Essay, which really is examination, testing, or scrutiny. He describes the contents of his book as

Certaine breif notes, sett downe rather significantlye, then curiously, w^ch^ I have called *Essaies*. The word is late, but the thing is auncient. For *Senacaes* Epistles to *Lucilius*, yf one marke them well, are but *Essaies*, — That is dispersed

Meditacons, thoughe conveyed in the forme of Epistles. Theis labors of myne I know cannot be worthie of yo^r H: for what can be worthie of you. But my hope is, they may be as graynes of salte, that will rather give you an appetite, then offend you w^th satiety. And althoughe they handle those things wherein both mens Lives and theire pens are most conversant yet (What I have attained, I knowe not) but I have endeavoured to make them not vulgar; but of a nature, whereof a man shall find much in experience, litle in bookes; so as they are neither repeticons nor fansies.

In 1617 Bacon rose to be Lord Chancellor: in 1621 he was deposed by the House of Commons for taking bribes. In 1625, from his enforced retirement, a year before his death, he published the final edition of the *Essays*, fifty-eight in all; and in the same year appeared a Latin translation made under his supervision; Bacon holding that "these modern languages will at one time or other play the bankrupts with books." The English edition is dedicated to the Duke of Buckingham, and Bacon, or rather Lord St. Albans, was careful to explain to the favourite that he had chosen for an offering this volume, because of all his works these had been most current; "for that as it seemes they come home to Mens businesse and bosomes." It was characteristic of the man to speak truth for the occasion of flattery.

Yet, so strange is man, from this mean nature proceeded a store of the wisest and most illuminating thoughts. The work of his maturity is free from that exclusive preoccupation with worldly success which disfigured the first group of essays; and the character of the writing changes. The essayist replaces the writer of precepts, a larger utterance succeeds the cramped sententiousness. Probably the finest thing in the whole is the opening essay *Of Truth*; but certainly the most human is that *Of Gardens*, which brings us far indeed

from the first chilly abstracts of his wisdom. It opens :

God *Almightie* first Planted a *Garden*. And indeed, it is the Purest of Humane pleasures. It is the Greatest Refreshment to the Spirits of Man ; Without which, *Buildings* and *Pallaces* are but Grosse Handy-works : And a Man shall ever see, that when Ages grow to Civility and Elegancie, Men come to *Build Stately*, sooner then to *Garden Finely* : As if *Gardening* were the Greater Perfection. I doe hold it, in the Royall Ordering of *Gardens*, there ought to be *Gardens*, for all the *Moneths* in the Yeare : In which, severally, Things of Beautie, may be then in Season.

Further on he writes in a charming passage :

And because, the *Breath* of Flowers, is farre Sweeter in the Aire, (where it comes and Goes, like the Warbling of Musick) then in the hand, therfore nothing is more fit for that delight, then to know, what be the *Flowers*, and *Plants* that doe best perfume the Aire. Roses Damask & Red, are fast Flowers of their Smels ; So that ; you may walke by a whole Row of them, and finde Nothing of their Sweetnesse ; Yea though it be, in a Mornings Dew. Bayes likewise yeeld no Smell, as they grow. Rosemary little ; Nor Sweet-Marioram. That, which above all Others, yeelds the *Sweetest Smell* in the *Aire*, is the Violet ; Specially the White-double-Violet, which comes twice a Yeare ; About the middle of *Aprill*, and about *Bartholomew-tide*. Next to that is, the Muske-Rose. Then the Strawberry-Leaves dying, which [yeeld] a most Excellent Cordiall Smell. Then the Flower of the Vines ; It is a little dust, like the dust of a Bent, which growes upon the Cluster, in the First comming forth. Then Sweet Briar. Then Wall-Flowers, which are very Delightfull, to be set under a Parler, or Lower Chamber Window. Then Pincks, and Gilly-Flowers, specially the Matted Pinck, & Clove Gilly-flower. Then the Flowers of the Lime tree. Then the Hony-Suckles, so they be somewhat a farre off. Of Beane Flowers I speake not, because they are Field Flowers. But those which *Perfume* the Aire most delightfully, not *passed by* as the rest, but being *Troden upon* and *Crushed*, are Three : That is Burnet, Wilde-Time, and Water-Mints. Therefore, you are to set whole Allies of them, to have the Pleasure, when you walke or tread.

As among the prose writers contemporary with

Bacon, so among his immediate successors, it is easy to select individual passages which dazzle by their beauty of expression and lofty range of thought, yet hard to name many books which retain their vogue to-day. Readers who light upon Bishop Earle's *Characters* or James Howell's *Instructions for Foreigne Travell* may be delighted with their quaintness and wit; Charles Lamb, saturated with the literature of the pre-Restoration days, has made Fuller's name at least universally familiar. But in the whole period between the death of Elizabeth and the return of Charles II. to England there are only three prose authors for whose work any general popularity can be claimed; and the first of these is in no way typical of his age. Izaak Walton, whose *Complete Angler* was published in 1653, is perhaps rather a patron saint than an author; not one in a thousand of those who know his name have read him; and those who read him are charmed precisely by that absence of artifice, that sweet and simple limpidity of phrase, which are the excellences most lacking in his contemporaries. Probably he derived them from the inherent virtue of his favourite pursuit; anyhow, in right of them, he takes his place rather beside Bunyan than with either of the two great and typical writers who may be chosen to represent that age.

The first of these, Sir Thomas Browne (knighted by Charles II.), was a physician practising at Norwich. He was educated at Oxford, and published in the course of his long life three books: first and best known, his *Religio Medici*; then his treatise on Vulgar Errors (*Pseudodoxia Epidemica*) and lastly the Urn Burial (*Hydriotaphia*) and *Garden of Cyrus*. In 1716, long after his death, was issued his discourse on *Christian Morals*.

Writing in a time when the Latin and Greek authors were still the chief reading of educated men, and a display of this erudition was accounted the best literary ornament, Browne garnished his thoughts with much classical allusion, which probably seems to us more pedantic than it did to his contemporaries, and arouses at the first encounter that half tolerant amusement which we feel for the obsolete. His style, which pushed the habit of Latinising at times to sheer extravagance, still further inclines the reader to regard him with curiosity rather than understanding. Take, for instance, the opening paragraph of *Christian Morals* :

> Tread softly and circumspectly in this funambulatory Track and narrow Path of Goodness: pursue Virtue virtuously: leven not good Actions nor render Virtues disputable. Stain not fair Acts with foul Intentions: maim not Uprightness by halting Concomitances, nor circumstantially deprave substantial Goodness.

We cannot think of what the man is saying for looking at his ruff and embroidered doublet. And to a certain extent, with Browne the style is always the dress rather than the man ; we are brought in contact rather with the furniture of his mind than with the mind itself. But whoever peruses any one of his books, which are in reality the loosely-strung meditations of an admirable essayist, will soon discern the personality that underlies this queer costume. It is well revealed in an early passage of the *Religio Medici*, which book opens by a general description of its author's belief. Having in the first instance assumed "the honourable stile of a Christian," he proceeds further to express his adhesion to "that Reformed new-cast Religion of which I dislike nothing but the name." Then, after a charming defence of his predilection for ceremonies in devotion, he limits his allegiance

in particular to the Church of England, yet not so as to retort any contumely upon the "Bishop of Rome, to whom, as a temporal Prince, we owe the duty of good language." This frame of temperate disagreement in dispute is, he explains, natural to him rather than enjoined :

I could never divide my self from any man upon the difference of an opinion, or be angry with his judgment for not agreeing with me in that from which perhaps within a few days I should dissent my self. I have no Genius to disputes in Religion, and have often thought it wisdom to decline them, especially upon a disadvantage, or when the cause of Truth might suffer in the weakness of my patronage. Where we desire to be informed, 'tis good to contest with men above our selves; but to confirm and establish our opinions, 'tis best to argue with judgments below our own, that the frequent spoils and Victories over their reasons may settle in our selves an esteem and confirmed Opinion of our own. Every man is not a proper Champion for Truth, nor fit to take up the Gauntlet in the cause of Verity : many, from the ignorance of these Maximes, and an inconsiderate Zeal unto Truth, have too rashly charged the Troops of Error, and remain as Trophies unto the enemies of Truth. A man may be in as just possession of Truth as of a City, and yet be forced to surrender; 'tis therefore far better to enjoy her with peace, than to hazzard her on a battle. If, therefore, there rise any doubts in my way, I do forget them, or at least defer them till my better setled judgement and more manly reason be able to resolve them; for I perceive every man's own reason is his best Œdipus, and will, upon a reasonable truce, find a way to loose those bonds wherewith the subtleties of error have enchained our more flexible and tender judgements. In Philosophy, where Truth seems double-fac'd, there is no man more Paradoxical than my self : but in Divinity I love to keep the Road; and, though not in an implicite, yet an humble faith, follow the great wheel of the Church, by which I move, not reserving any proper Poles or motion from the Epicycle of my own brain. By this means I leave no gap for Heresies, Schismes, or Errors, of which at present I hope I shall not injure Truth to say I have no taint or tincture. I must confess my greener studies have been polluted with two or three; not any begotten in the latter Centuries, but old and obsolete, such as could never have been revived, but by such extravagant and

irregular heads as mine: for indeed Heresies perish not with their Authors, but, like the river Arethusa, though they lose their currents in one place, they rise up again in another. One General Council is not able to extirpate one single Heresie: it may be cancell'd for the present; but revolution of time, and the like aspects from Heaven, will restore it, when it will flourish till it be condemned again. For as though there were a Metempsuchosis, and the soul of one man passed into another, Opinions do find, after certain Revolutions, men and minds like those that first begat them. To see our selves again, we need not look for Plato's year: every man is not only himself; there hath been many Diogenes, and as many Timons, though but few of that name: men are liv'd over again, the world is now as it was in Ages past; there was none then, but there hath been some one since that parallels him, and is, as it were, his revived self.

The heresies, which he goes on to own for his, are of no very damning description — a disposition to pray for the dead, an inability to believe in eternal punishment, figure in the list. But it is our business here to comment rather upon the method of the discourse — which, as it will be seen, draws a wide range of subjects into its ample scope — and the style, so leisurely, so involved, and so highly coloured. Within our own time we have seen a great master of prose, R. L. Stevenson, depart deliberately from the more classical ideals of simplicity and model himself on these balanced periods, this research for the strange word, which led Browne into his "funambulatory track." One needs to repeat that the true excellences of Browne do not lie in his departure from the ordinary standard of speech, however charming may be the shock of their surprise, as here:

All flesh is grass, is not onely metaphorically, but litterally, true; for all those creatures we behold are but the herbs of the field, digested into flesh in them, *or more remotely carnified in our selves.*

They reside rather in such a passage as the longer

one quoted above, in which, upon the whole, plain words are used to convey pregnant and beautiful ideas and are set to a stately and moving music.

We come nearer to the model of a serviceable prose, which can at will infuse beauty into the plainness of common speech, in the writings of the great preacher Jeremy Taylor. Born in 1613, and educated at Cambridge, the eloquent youth early attracted the notice of Laud. The reign of Charles I. produced in the English Church a singular number of persons who had the gift of devotional poetry ; George Herbert, Quarles, Crashaw and Vaughan each wrote verse which still has many readers even among those who read little other poetry. But in Taylor's sermons, and above all in his two manuals of conduct and devotion, *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*, the same inspiration found its fullest utterance. They were written, like most of his works, when the hand of the Commonwealth was heavy upon the Church. Yet in the first years after the death of the King — with whom Taylor had lived in close relations — a peaceful retreat was found for the preacher at Golden Grove, Lord Carbery's home in Wales. Here for a considerable period he enjoyed happy seclusion, before his writings drew trouble and even imprisonment on him — a stormy passage, not much amended after the Restoration by his promotion to the uneasy honour of the Irish Bishopric of Dromore. He died at Lisburn in County Down in 1667.

Although exceeded in literary merit by the *Holy Dying*, there is little doubt that Taylor is best known to-day by his *Rule and Exercises of Holy Living*, published in 1650, which he himself defined as a treatise dealing with "the means and instruments of obtaining every virtue, and the remedies

against every vice, and considerations serving to the resisting of all temptations, together with prayers containing the Whole Duty of a Christian." From it may be quoted first a passage on Contentedness, in which eloquence rises very near to poetry, and puts living virtue into the most ancient commonplace of exhortation:

Consider how many excellent personages in all ages have suffered as great or greater calamities than this which now tempts thee to impatience. Almost all the ages of the world have noted that their most eminent scholars were most eminently poor, some by choice, but most by chance, and an inevitable decree of Providence; and in the whole sex of women God hath decreed the sharpest pains of child-birth, to show that there is no state exempt from sorrow, and yet that the weakest persons have strength more than enough to bear the greatest evils; and the greatest queens, and the mothers of saints and apostles, have no charter of exemption from this sad sentence. But the Lord of men and angels was also the King of sufferings; and if thy coarse robe trouble thee, remember the swaddling-clothes of Jesus; if thy bed be uneasy, yet it is not worse than His manger; and it is no sadness to have a thin table, if thou callest to mind that the King of heaven and earth was fed with a little breast-milk: and yet, besides this, He suffered all the sorrows which we deserved. We therefore have great reason to sit down upon our own hearths, and warm ourselves at our own fires, and feed upon content at home; for it were a strange pride to expect to be more gently treated by the Divine Providence than the best and wisest men, than apostles and saints, nay, the Son of the eternal God, the heir of both the worlds.

Yet there is a simpler and more touching beauty in this section from the chapter on Hope:

If your case be brought to the last extremity, and that you are at the pit's brink, even the very margin of the grave, yet then despair not; at least put it off a little longer: and remember that whatsoever final accident takes away all hope from you, if you stay a little longer, and, in the meanwhile, bear it sweetly, it will also take away all despair too. For when you enter into the regions of death you rest from all your labours and your fears.

That passage has something magical in the cadence of its words, a solemn harmony of utterance; and in the phrase "when you enter into the regions of death," there is felt the touch of imagination which gives at once body and definition to the vague idea of an existence ended and yet continued.

One could easily quote passages even more beautiful from this great writer: but also sentences which defy grammar, and long periods that are clumsy and confused. And at the best Taylor's prose is fitted to the purpose of a preacher; it is a little too dignified, too stately, for common uses. The art of a prose which could dispense with the colours of poetry or the tone of the orator had yet to be introduced into English letters.

CHAPTER VI

MILTON

THE study of a writer's life, if it be possible, is always advantageous for the full understanding of his work ; in the case of Milton it is indispensable. Many men have deliberately chosen to be poets, but not as Milton did. Poetry was to him a sacred vocation, exacting an arduous discipline of the intelligence and character ; and yet he felt himself impelled to relinquish wholly the making of verse during a period of twenty years in the plenitude of his powers. *Paradise Lost*, the work by which he is above all known, is the full and fit expression of a long life's gathered knowledge and experience; but in all the poetry that he ever wrote, the whole man, as he was at the time of writing, is implicit. For Milton had no dramatic gift to project himself into another's personality, no concern indeed with any personality or any thoughts but his own. Nor had he humour that should tempt him even to raise a doubt for a moment as to his real conviction. Thus, whereas Shakespeare shows us a whole world of men and women, good and bad, great and small, their thoughts and their feelings, Milton shows us the thoughts, the feelings, the beliefs, and the

imaginings of one man. And therefore we only follow Milton's indication in trying to learn all that is to be known of John Milton, in order that we may know what his poetry meant to Milton when he wrote it.

Milton's father was a prosperous and cultivated man of business living in Cheapside. His son, born in 1608 in London, was bred in London at St. Paul's School and under a tutor. The boy was precocious in study, "which," he says, "I seized with such eagerness that from the twelfth year of my age I scarce ever went to bed before midnight." His paraphrases of the Psalms date from his school-days. At the age of sixteen he went to Christ's College, Cambridge, and there spent seven years. He had been destined for the Church, but early formed the opinion that "he who would take orders must subscribe slave." But the freedom which Milton craved was only of the mind; license was abhorrent to him, and his college nickname, the "lady of Christ's," had a reference not merely to his beauty. The *Hymn on the Nativity*, begun on Christmas morning in his twenty-first year (1629), marks at once the character of his beliefs and his imaginings. The subject of his first great poem is Christian; the poet already bids his Muse to "join her voice unto the angel-quire." He celebrates the coming of Christ, and pictures all the pageantry of heaven, "the helméd Cherubim and sworded Seraphim," and at the same time images the overthrow of the world's false gods, whom already he identified with the rebel angels. And yet even the verses that proclaim this ruin seem touched with a pity; one so steeped in classic literature could not be insensible to the beauty of paganism.

> The lonely mountains o'er,
> And the resounding shore,

A voice of weeping heard and loud lament,
From haunted spring and dale,
Edged with poplar pale,
The parting Genius is with sighing sent;
With flower-inwoven tresses torn,
The Nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.

The conscious dedication of his life to a slowly shaping purpose is plainly expressed in the second sonnet, written in December, 1631:

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!
My hasting days fly on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.
Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth,
That I to manhood am arriv'd so near;
And inward ripeness doth much less appear
That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.
Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure even
To that same lot, however mean or high,
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven:
All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great Task-Master's eye.

Ten years later, in 1641, this purpose is more fully declared, when he writes of "an inward prompting which grows daily upon me, that by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life, I might perhaps leave something so written to after times as they should not willingly let it die." Proud as the words seem, they are in reality modest; for when he wrote them Milton had already secured his immortality.

Let us consider these nine years and their work. In 1632 he left Cambridge, and retired at the age of twenty-four to live without avowed profession in the house bought by his father in the little village of Horton, near Windsor. Here, within the first year of his sojourn, were written the "twin idylls" *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, which picture between them a student's ideal day and ideal night.

Possibly earlier, possibly later, was written the *Arcades*, described as part of a masque — the libretto, as we should say, of a scenic and musical entertainment which was performed by her descendants before the aged Countess of Derby, whom in her youth Spenser had celebrated. And in 1634, at the instance of his friend, Henry Lawes, the musical composer, Milton furnished the poetic framework of another masque, which was to be presented at Ludlow Castle before the Earl of Bridgewater, Lord President of Wales, chief among the performers being the Lord President's two sons and a daughter, Lady Alice Egerton. Masques were then at the height of their vogue, for in 1633 the Puritan Prynne had published his *Histriomastix, or Scourge of Players*, and to revive theatrical entertainments was to discountenance Puritanism. It is noteworthy that Milton was at this time no less ready than Shirley, Carew, or any cavalier poet to fall in with a fashion that lent so fine a scope to poetic genius. Yet, — though in *Comus* he outdid all rivals, and, though three years later, doubtless in response to a demand for copies, Lawes published the text, — the author still remained anonymous and inscribed a verse from Virgil on the title page, signifying a fear that he had exposed blossoms to rough weather. His only previous appearance in print had been (fitly enough) in the second folio of Shakespeare, to which he contributed the lines beginning :

> What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones?

But, in the very year (1637) which saw *Comus* published, he was again urged into print, by the call on him to contribute to a volume of memorial verses issued to deplore the loss of Edward King, a Fellow of Milton's own college, who was drowned

between Chester and Dublin. And it should be noted that *Lycidas* opens explicitly with a repetition of the same fear lest the predestined poet should be forestalling the ripeness of his genius.

> Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more
> Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,
> I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude;
> And, with forced fingers rude,
> Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.

But if it opened with a deprecation, it closed with a promise :

> Thus sang the uncouth swain to the oaks and rills,
> While the still morn went out with sandals grey;
> He touch'd the tender stops of various quills,
> With eager thought warbling his Doric lay:
> And now the sun had stretch'd out all the hills,
> And now was dropt into the western bay:
> At last he rose, and twitch'd his mantle blue:
> To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new.

In other words, the leisurely existence was to go on, the fruit was to ripen quietly and be gathered : and as part of the ripening process, Milton projected a tour of foreign travel, for which his father, indulgent to the young man's declared though ill-defined purpose, provided funds. The memorial volume, containing twenty-three pieces of Greek or Latin verse, and thirteen English elegies (of which *Lycidas*, signed 'J. M.', was the longest and the last), appeared in 1638, and shortly afterwards Milton left England. The date should be remembered. Milton was twenty-nine when he wrote "To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new" (that is, to new themes of idyllic verse); he little knew that old age and calamity would be upon him before he attempted again a sustained flight in poetry.

In the year and a half which he spent abroad, mainly in Italy, he wrote much Latin verse, as he had always done, and experimented in Italian ; but

he wrote no English poetry. In the end of 1638 he was in Naples, whence he intended to proceed to Sicily and Greece, but news from home of the growing struggle against absolutism in Church and State altered his project. "I considered it dishonourable," he wrote later, "to be enjoying myself at ease in foreign lands while my countrymen were contending for their liberty at home." And with a new purpose, again no less steady because undefined, he set his face homeward. It is well to consider here the work of his first and sunny period, accomplished while life had few cares for him yet, and before he was forced to enter one of the two hostile camps between which England was divided.

We have spoken of the great *Hymn* and its affinities with his later work; but he descended from these solemn and sky-reaching thoughts for a period. *Il Penseroso* and *L'Allegro* come as near lightness as Milton cared to go, and they describe the pleasures of a scholar poet who lives in the country. No description of these familiar poems is needed, but one may recall the love expressed in them for romances that tell of "knights and barons bold," and

> Store of ladies, whose bright eyes
> Rain influence and judge the prize;

even for play books, and the "well-trod stage":

> If Jonson's learned sock be on,
> Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,
> Warble his native wood-notes wild.

The cheerful scholar's day begins at morning; that of the same scholar in his other mood — for *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are only the two phases of one type — opens at sunset and lasts through night. Here is how its opening is described, in lines that show Milton's wonderful mastery of

metre and language; we hear his curfew, we see his fire-lit gloom.

> Oft, on a plat of rising ground,
> I hear the far-off curfew sound,
> Over some wide-watered shore,
> Swinging slow with sullen roar:
> Or, if the air will not permit,
> Some still removed place will fit,
> Where glowing embers through the room
> Teach light to counterfeit a gloom:
> Far from all resort of mirth,
> Save the cricket on the hearth,
> Or the bellman's drowsy charm,
> To bless the doors from nightly harm.

The night is spent in reading, but not now with the comedians; we hear of the scholar's wish to

> Unsphere
> The spirit of Plato, to unfold
> What worlds or what vast regions hold
> The immortal mind that hath forsook
> Her mansion in this fleshly nook.

If not philosophy, "Gorgeous Tragedy in sceptred pall" must be his companion; but Greek tragedy, though he adds a saving clause:

> Or what (though rare) of later age
> Ennobled hath the buskin'd stage.

Above all he sighs for a power, if it could be granted, to commune with

> Him that left half told
> The story of Cambuscan bold

(Chaucer, in his romantic vein),

> And if aught else great bards beside
> In sage and solemn tunes have sung,
> Of turneys, and of trophies hung,
> Of forests, and enchantments drear,
> Where more is meant than meets the ear

— that is, Spenser and his allegories.

After such a night, dawn is to come, but a dawn grey and quiet:

Or ushered with a shower still,
When the gust hath blown his fill,
Ending on the rustling leaves,
With minute-drops from off the eaves.

Those lines may be quoted as among the highest examples of the art which can suggest a complex impression by a single well-chosen detail.

As in *L'Allegro*, so in the companion poem, the close, or the accompaniment of the whole, is music, but here, such music as is heard within "the studious cloister's pale," among

Antique pillars massy proof,
And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light:
There let the pealing organ blow,
To the full-voiced quire below.

This passage should be remembered not only for its beauty, but for its insight into the mind of a cultured Puritan. And taken together, the two poems express fully Milton's youth, in its dignity, its austere beauty, its full-fed and learned imagination.

Comus, though a larger work, is less characteristic, yet characteristic enough. Comus, son of Circe, an enchanter who can turn his victims into beasts, meets a beautiful maiden lost and wandering by night; but his spells are powerless against her chastity, and his palace is broken and shattered by her two brothers, fortified with a charm given them by the Lady's attendant Spirit disguised as a shepherd. But the enchanter escapes and the Lady remains spell-bound till Sabrina, goddess and nymph of Chastity, is invoked and liberates her. The moral of the whole is given in the Spirit's epilogue:

Mortals that would follow me,
Love Virtue; she alone is free.
She can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the sphery chime;
Or if Virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her.

The last two lines were inscribed by Milton in a book where he wrote his autograph. Throughout the whole, beauty is lavish; yet one cannot but feel that the Lady lacks the charm of Shakespeare's errant damsels, and, generally speaking, the dramatic quality is absent. Nevertheless, Taine thought it Milton's most perfect work. *Lycidas*, however, is more important in a study of the man's development, since here for the first time another voice than the student poet's is heard. The elegy opens with the pastoral and classic masquerade: Milton is a young shepherd mourning for the untimely death of another:

> For we were nursed upon the self-same hill,
> Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill.

He calls upon the nymphs to excuse their scant care of their "lov'd Lycidas," cut off before austere youth had its reward in Fame, which is

> The spur that the clear spirit doth raise
> (That last infirmity of noble mind)
> To scorn delights and live laborious days.

The nymphs are silent, but Neptune sends a herald to testify that no storm destroyed Lycidas; and after him comes Camus, the river Cam personified in Latin, but wearing his proper attributes:

> His mantle hairy, and his bonnet sedge.

And then, after all this graceful fancy, comes the new strain, so sudden and unexpected that its introduction has often been criticised as inharmonious, of St. Peter's anathemas over unworthy and worldly-minded aspirants for church office. The purpose of elegy is drowned in denunciation; but, whether one likes it or no in the context, there is no mistaking the force and sincerity of these lines. Ruskin in a famous criticism has expounded all

that is condensed into the tremendous phrase "blind mouths"; bishops (that is, overseers) who cannot see, pastors who feed not their flocks but themselves. Before this outburst, we know Milton only as one busy with books and the beauty of the world, dwelling among dreams; here the cry of a national contest is heard, with the harsh note of partisan bitterness giving a stridency even to noble indignation. And for the next twenty years nothing but that cry and that note are heard from Milton.

On returning from travel, he plunged into controversy on the Presbyterian side, and his first treatise, *Of Reformation in Church Government*, dealt explicitly with the evils he had denounced allegorically in *Lycidas*. From the house in London where he settled he poured out pamphlet after pamphlet; and since in his attacks on the established Church he knew no moderation, violent retorts came. To these personal charges he made answer, and a famous autobiographical passage describes his education at college and his growing predilection for the poets, and above all the chaste poets: wherefore, he writes, that he

"Above them all preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts without transgression. And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem, that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things, not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that is praiseworthy."

During this time Milton was busy with the education of his two nephews and the sons of other friends, and on this subject also he was drawn to

express theories in a *Tractate of Education*. His next publication had an intimate and painful personal interest. In 1643, at the age of thirty-five, he married on very short acquaintance Mary Powell, a girl of seventeen, and the child of cavalier parents. A month after marriage, she left him to return to her home, and refused to come back. There was then no law of divorce, and Milton, whose view of domestic relations was largely coloured by the Old Testament, wrote a pamphlet called *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. The tenets expressed in it scandalised the Presbyterians, among whom Milton was still ranked, and the ensuing quarrel threw him completely into the new party of the Independents. He defended his views in other pamphlets, and, failing of redress for his grievance, actually contemplated forming a marriage in defiance of law; when, in 1645, his wife sought a reconciliation, and he not only forgave her, but, in the next year, afforded shelter to her whole family, whose estate and house had been sequestered and who sought protection from Milton's influence with the now dominant party. It has been pointed out that the scene in *Paradise Lost*, where Eve after the fall, rebuked and repulsed by Adam, falls at her lord's feet, was doubtless inspired by the memory of what happened when the pair were brought together by friendly conspiracy at a house in London. The passage may be quoted as perhaps the nearest approach to drama in *Paradise Lost* and also as expressing well at once Milton's sensibility to female beauty and his attitude towards the sex. Adam speaks :

> "O! why did God,
> Creator wise, that peopled highest Heaven
> With spirits masculine, create at last
> This novelty on Earth, this fair defect
> Of Nature, and not fill the World at once
> With men, as Angels, without feminine;

Or find some other way to generate
Mankind? This mischief had not then befallen,
And more that shall befall — innumerable
Disturbances on Earth through female snares,
And straight conjunction with this sex. For either
He never shall find out fit mate, but such
As some misfortune brings him, or mistake;
Or whom he wishes most shall seldom gain,
Through her perverseness, but shall see her gain'd
By a far worse, or, if she love, withheld
By parents; or his happiest choice too late
Shall meet, already link'd and wedlock-bound
To a fell adversary, his hate or shame:
Which infinite calamity shall cause
To human life, and household peace confound."
He added not, and from her turned: but Eve,
Not so repulsed, with tears that ceased not flowing,
And tresses all disordered, at his feet
Fell humble; and, embracing them, besought
His peace, and thus proceeded in her plaint:
"Forsake me not thus, Adam! witness Heaven
What love sincere, and reverence in my heart
I bear thee, and unweeting have offended,
Unhappily deceived! Thy suppliant
I beg, and clasp thy knees; bereave me not,
Whereon I live, thy gentle looks, thy aid,
Thy counsel, in this uttermost distress,
My only strength and stay. Forlorn of thee
Whither shall I betake me, where subsist?
While yet we live, scarce one short hour perhaps,
Between us two let there be peace; both joining
As joined in injuries, one enmity
Against a foe by doom express assigned us,
That cruel Serpent. On me exercise not
Thy hatred for this misery befallen;
On me already lost, me than thyself
More miserable! Both have sinn'd; but thou
Against God only, I against God and thee;
And to the place of judgment will return,
There with my cries importune Heaven; that all
The sentence, from thy head remov'd, may light
On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe;
Me, me only, just object of his ire!"
She ended weeping; and her lowly plight
Immoveable, till peace obtained from fault
Acknowledged and deplored, in Adam wrought

> Commiseration. Soon his heart relented
> Towards her, his life so late, and sole delight,
> Now at his feet submissive in distress;
> Creature so fair his reconcilement seeking,
> His counsel, whom she had displeased, his aid :
> As one disarmed, his anger all he lost,
> And thus with peaceful words upraised her soon.

In 1644, before this reconciliation, had been published the most famous of his tracts, the *Areopagitica*, an address to Parliament, pleading for freedom of the press. The best known passage in it may be cited as an example of the glorious bursts of eloquence which illuminate his prose writings :

I deny not but that it is of greatest concernment in the church and commonwealth to have a vigilant eye how books demean themselves, as well as men, and thereafter to confine, imprison, and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors, — for books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve, as in a vial, the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively and as vigorously productive as those fabulous dragon's teeth; and, being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men. And yet, on the other hand, unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book. Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself; kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. It is true no age can restore a life, whereof, perhaps, there is no great loss; and revolutions of ages do not oft recover the loss of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse. We should be wary, therefore, what persecution we raise against the living labours of public men, how we spill that seasoned life of man preserved and stored up in books, since we see a kind of homicide may be thus committed, — sometimes a martyrdom; and if it extend to the whole impression, a kind of massacre, whereof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elemental life, but

strikes at the ethereal and fifth essence, — the breath of reason itself; slays an immortality rather than a life.

Owing to these numerous prose publications, it was only natural that, although an edition of his early poems was printed in 1645, Milton should be known mainly as a pamphleteer; and after the overthrow of the Crown he was committed finally to employing his pen in prose. He was appointed Secretary to the Committee for Foreign Affairs, Latin being then the language of diplomacy; and thus the student was drawn from his retirement into close touch with the most important affairs. Pamphleteering was now actually laid upon him as an official duty, and, not unwillingly, he wrote *Eikonoklastes* (the Image Breaker) as a counter-blast to *Eikon Basilike* (the Image of Royalty), a book composed by Dr. Gauden and issued as the prison-meditations of King Charles. In the same spirit of zeal which urged him to this furious invective, he wrote, in Latin, his *Defence of the English People*. It was this labour that finally brought upon him the calamity of blindess. He had warning; but, as he wrote in the *Second Defence*, "the choice lay before between dereliction of a supreme duty and loss of eyesight." The English people were ill defended, for Milton wasted his energy in vituperation of Salmasius, the scholar who had written the *Defensio Regia*. But the spirit of their defender was sublime.

It is needless to follow Milton through his ceaseless activity of pamphleteering. During these years he wrote nothing of intrinsic literary value but a few sonnets. These, it should be noted, are composed, not like Shakespeare's and those of the Elizabethans generally, in three quatrains, rhyming independently, with a couplet to finish, but on the strict Italian model, which consists of an octave of

eight lines with only two rhymes (arranged thus — *a bba a bba* —), and a sestet of six lines with either two or three rhymes, arranged in different systems, but never closing with a couplet. An instance has been already given, but another may be cited, for the massacre of the Protestant Vaudois roused England to protest, and Milton wrote the formal dispatches as well as this famous explosion of resentment: [1]

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipt stocks and stones,
Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piemontese that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple Tyrant; that from these may grow,
A hundred fold, who, having learned thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

Another sonnet is in memory of his second wife, whom he married four years after the unlucky daughter of the Philistines had died in child-birth. The second — his "late espoused saint" — lived only fifteen months with him, and Milton married again in 1663; this third wife was a capable woman, who looked after the blind man and his three daughters. And by that time the poet sorely needed comfort.

His blindness had impeded his work as Latin Secretary, but even after Oliver's death he continued to pour out fiery political diatribes till the

[1] It should be noted that whereas the Shakespearian model breaks the sense at the conclusion of each quatrain, Milton makes octave and sestet each an organic whole, and, in the Vaudois sonnet, fuses the entire fourteen lines into one tremendous stanza.

very eve of the Restoration. At that change he went into hiding for two months before the Act of Oblivion left him free but wretched. The Restoration, says Mark Pattison, "was not merely a political defeat of his party, it was the total wreck of the principles, of the social and religious ideal with which Milton's life was bound up." Yet among the wreckage of his hopes, in the very blackness of despair, he went on with the great task in which he was already engaged. *Paradise Lost* was begun probably in 1658, and certainly was completed by 1665, for in that year Milton showed it to his Quaker friend Ellwood. The poet had then moved to the village of Chalfont St. Giles to escape the plague; and hither Ellwood came to return the manuscript and made his famous remark, "Thou hast said much here of *Paradise Lost*, what hast thou to say of *Paradise Regained*?" Milton told him later that the sequel owed its inception to this remark. *Paradise Lost* was published in 1667, the year after the great fire, and during that year *Paradise Regained* was doubtless in course of composition. It was published along with *Samson Agonistes* in 1670, and the poet saw a second edition of *Paradise Lost* issued before he died in November, 1674.

The history of literature shows no such long premeditated work as Milton's great epic. We have seen that by 1641 he was fully convinced of his predestination to produce a work only to be accomplished "by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and all knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the life of whom he pleases." Moreover, there are preserved to us, among his jottings in a notebook from the

same date, notes of the subjects which occurred to him as suitable. *Paradise Lost* appears four times in distinct drafts for dramatic treatment. The lapse of a generation convinced him that epic, not drama, was his medium ; but he had conceived at thirty-two the work which he executed when over fifty. It has been pointed out that this union of youth and maturity gives a peculiar character to the poem ; and *Paradise Regained*, the work entirely of old age, is by contrast strangely lacking in constructive imagination. We may dismiss it here by saying that it is simply a narrative of the Temptation expanded from twenty verses of the Bible to 2000 lines ; enriched with superb descriptive passages, masterly beyond praise in its verse ; but resolving itself essentially into a dialogue between the incarnate powers of good and evil — a dialogue destitute of drama, because Milton is too devout to convey even for a moment the sense that the Tempter can by any possibility work upon the Tempted.

Very different is the conception of the Arch-Fiend in *Paradise Lost*. There Satan, as has been said, is the true hero, the victor in the play. In *Paradise Regained*, his part is subaltern, and he is the spirit of sly deceit, not as in the earlier poem the incarnation of superb revolt. Milton, himself a rebel and a defeated rebel, could easily interpret the temper of the fallen and unsubdued.

For the subject of *Paradise Lost* is not only the loss of Paradise to man, but the whole sequence of events which led to it. We learn how the Son of God was born ; how Lucifer, a chief of angels, envying the honour attributed to the Son, rose in revolt with a host of followers, and by the Son's might was, after pitched battle, driven in ruin down from the precipice of heaven ; how God, to

show his power undiminished, called into being a new world with the parents of a new race; and how Lucifer—now Satan—planned with his fallen angels in hell reprisals upon this late-born and weaker outpost of God's sovereignty. All this, as well as Satan's adventurous journey through the unfathomed abyss, his lighting in Eden, and his final success, are narrated before we learn in the last book how the first man and first woman were for disobedience driven out of the garden of the Lord. But these events are not told in bald sequence; they are artfully introduced as the plot develops and needs fresh unfoldings of the past.

The scene opens in hell, while the fallen angels still welter in the sea of fire; and now for the first time Satan lifts his head, and, calling to one by his side,

> One next himself in power, and next in crime,
> Long after known in Palestine, and named
> Beelzebub,

the Arch-enemy rouses him with splendid words:

> What though the field be lost?
> All is not lost; the unconquerable will
> And study of revenge, immortal hate,
> And courage never to submit or yield,
> And what is else not to be overcome?

This comrade doubts at first till Satan animates him with sentiments not unmeet for Milton's own case:

> The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.

This done, they wing their heavy flight to firm ground, and summon their shattered legions, of whose chiefs the names are recorded. These are not the names they had in heaven, but titles later bestowed, in Egypt, in Canaan, in Syria, and in

Greece; for here we have explicit statement, of what to Milton was no fancy, but a belief, that the heathen gods had essence and had power, though power only to delude. High debate is held (such as makes plain that the poet lived in a time when men's hopes and fears were riveted on Parliament) and at the last Satan unfolds his project, which is to make war not on heaven, but on heaven's new creation. The task of traversing chaos thither he claims for his own. So, passing through hell gate, kept by Sin and her offspring, Death, he

> Springs upward, like a pyramid of fire,
> Into the wild expanse, and, through the shock
> Of fighting elements, on all sides round
> Environed, wins his way.

Imagination has no more wonderful triumph than the description of this strange enterprise. To convey to human understanding the sense of more than human difficulties, of superhuman power pushing through the inchoate and clogging huddle of solid and vacuum, is a task that only Milton could have achieved. And then, for a radiant contrast, heaven opens on us in the third book: preluded by that invocation to "holy Light, offspring of Heaven firstborn," so infinitely touching from the blind. With sublime egoism Milton does not hesitate to intersperse in the epic allusions to his own affliction and his own perseverance:

> Yet not the more
> Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
> Clear spring, or shady grove, or sunny hill,
> Smit with the love of sacred song; but chief
> Thee, Sion, and the flowery brooks beneath,
> That wash thy hallowed feet, and warbling flow,
> Nightly I visit; nor sometimes forget
> These other two equalled with me in fate,
> So were I equalled with them in renown,
> Blind Thamyris, and blind Mæonides,
> And Tiresias, and Phineus, prophets old:

Then feed on thoughts, that voluntary move
Harmonious numbers; as the wakeful bird
Sings darkling, and in shadiest covert hid,
Tunes her nocturnal note. Thus with the year
Seasons return; but not to me returns
Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,
Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men
Cut off, and for the book of knowledge fair,
Presented with a universal blank
Of nature's works to me expung'd and ras'd,
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
So much the rather thou, celestial Light,
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate; there plant eyes; all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

After the prelude, it cannot be said that the description of heaven matches that of hell. God the Father, foretelling the doom of man, "argues like a school divine"; and the Son's proffer of Himself for atonement has little of the attractive grace essential to Christianity. But, when the tale returns to Satan perched on the outskirts of the world, the inspiration returns also. Disguised as a seraph of heaven, the invader passes Uriel, the angel of the Sun, and is directed to Adam's abode. And so the tempter reaches his goal, and the fourth book opens with a great cry:

O, for that warning voice, which he, who saw
The Apocalypse, heard cry in Heaven aloud.

Yet for a moment Satan feels almost remorse, and reviews in soliloquy his fall, his punishment, and his hope of grace:

'Me miserable! which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath and infinite despair?

* * * * *

> O, then, at last relent: is there no place
> Left for repentance, none for pardon left?
> None left but by submission.

And since that way for Milton's Satan is impossible — as for Milton himself towards the new rulers — the speech closes with the famous lines:

> Evil, be thou my Good: by thee at least
> Divided empire with Heaven's King I hold,
> By thee, and more than half perhaps will reign.

Then follows the glorious description of Eden, of its rivers and of the wall of Paradise which Satan overleaps, to see within among the gambolling beasts of the field

> Two of far nobler shape, erect and tall,

a pair so beautiful that the watching enemy is touched with pity, and glosses his purpose "with necessity, the Tyrant's plea":

> Yet no purposed foe
> To you, whom I could pity thus forlorn,
> Though I unpitied: league with you I seek,
> And mutual amity, so straight, so close,
> That I with you must dwell, or you with me,
> Henceforth. My dwelling haply may not please,
> Like this fair Paradise, your sense: yet such
> Accept your Maker's work; he gave it me,
> Which I as freely give. Hell shall unfold,
> To entertain you two, her widest gates,
> And send forth all her kings; there will be room,
> Not like these narrow limits, to receive
> Your numerous offspring; if no better place,
> Thank him who puts me loth to this revenge
> On you, who wrong me not, for him who wronged.

Listening, he hears Eve tell the story of her birth; then, from Adam's lips, he hears the privileges of Paradise and its one prohibition; he hears also of Eve's first meeting with her lord. Thus, dramatically, the narrative of creation is carried on; and Satan departs, having learnt now the clue

to follow; while Milton, depicting in glory the wedded happiness of Adam and Eve, praises also wedded love.

But Satan's entry has not been unespied, and the angel guard of Paradise are sent to discover the intruder, whom the young Ithuriel finds

> Squat like a toad close at the ear of Eve;

and, finding, touches him with his spear, whose celestial temper "no falsehood can endure." Then, in a flash like powder's explosion, "started up in his own shape the Fiend." To Ithuriel's question,

> "Know ye not then," said Satan filled with scorn:
> "Know ye not me? ye knew me once no mate
> For you, there sitting where ye durst not soar:
> Not to know me, argues yourselves unknown,
> The lowest of your throng; or, if ye know,
> Why ask ye, and superfluous begin
> Your message, like to end as much in vain?"

Yet he consents to accompany the cherub warders to Gabriel their chief, who, waiting with his band, discerns his scouts returning:

> And with them comes a third of regal port,
> But faded splendour wan.

Fierce words are bandied, and Gabriel threatens:

> But Satan to no threats
> Gave heed, but waxing more in rage replied:
> "Then when I am thy captive talk of chains
> Proud limitary cherub! but ere then
> Far heavier load thyself expect to feel
> From my prevailing arm, though Heaven's King
> Ride on thy wings, and thou with my compeers
> Used to the yoke, draw'st his triumphant wheels
> In progress through the road of heaven star-pav'd."
> While thus he spake, the angelic squadron bright
> Turn'd fiery red, sharpening in mooned horns
> Their phalanx, and began to hem him round
> With ported spears, as thick, as when a field
> Of Ceres ripe for harvest waving bends

> Her bearded grove of ears, which way the wind
> Sways them: the careful ploughman doubting stands,
> Lest on the threshing-floor his hopeful sheaves
> Prove chaff. On the other side, Satan, alarm'd,
> Collecting all his might, dilated stood,
> Like Teneriff or Atlas, unremov'd:
> His stature reached the sky, and on his crest
> Sat horror plumed; nor wanted in his grasp
> What seem'd both spear and shield.

The student will notice Milton's wonderful art to suggest the impression of terrific bulk and power — bodying forth what seems at once definite and yet impalpable. Only the greatest can defy logic as the poet does in the phrase, splendid in its very vagueness, "Nor wanted in his grasp what *seemed both spear and shield.*" Again: "On his crest sat horror" — so any rhetorician might have phrased it; but Milton writes, "On his crest sat horror *plum'd*," and at once the abstraction becomes definite, charged with life, though no man could pin the words to a precise meaning.

The fifth book recounts the wakening of Adam and Eve from sleep, the story of the dream which the tempter had poured into Eve's brain, and the visit to Paradise of Raphael, God's messenger, sent to expound to Adam his place in creation, and God's design. Thus is told, to them and to us, the story of the angelic revolt and the battle in heaven, ending with the admonition, which closes the sixth book.

> Firm they might have stood,
> Yet fell. Remember, and fear to transgress.

The line is a good example of Milton's skill with verse: for it can only be spoken rightly with a pause after the word 'remember,' a stronger pause after 'and,' and a heavy emphasis on 'fear.' To put the case technically, the fourth foot is inverted or trochaic — the whole stress lying on the first

syllable. Substitute 'do not' for 'fear to' and the difference will be evident between this commonplace rhythm and the slightly abnormal one which Milton employs — forcing the verse, as it were, to convey his own emphasis.

In the seventh book the story of creation is related by Raphael, the book of Genesis being expanded into glorious poetry, the expression of deep scientific knowledge (according to the lights of that time) kindled and fused by imagination.

In the eighth book, Adam, from being questioner, becomes narrator, and tells to Raphael what he remembers of his first awakening to consciousness, his talk with God, and of his first meeting and nuptials with Eve. It is well to quote Adam's discourse (or Milton's) concerning the experience of love in himself, "In all enjoyments else superior and unmoved:"

> Here only weak
> Against the charm of beauty's powerful glance.

For though he can

> Well understand in the prime end
> Of Nature her the inferior, in the mind
> And inward faculties, which most excel,

"yet," he continues,

> Yet when I approach
> Her loveliness, so absolute she seems
> And in herself complete, so well to know
> Her own, that what she wills to do or say
> Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best:
> All higher Knowledge in her presence falls
> Degraded; Wisdom in discourse with her
> Loses, discountenanced, and like folly shows;
> Authority and Reason on her wait,
> As one intended first, not after made
> Occasionally: and, to consummate all,
> Greatness of mind, and nobleness, their seat
> Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
> About her, as a guard angelic plac'd.

With the ninth book the tragedy begins: the story is told of the temptation and the fall of Eve; of her bringing the fruit to Adam, who (and here Milton departs sharply from Scripture) knows her to be lost, and eats out of sheer love, in order to perish with her. The close describes the effects on both, the luxurious intoxication, then the awakening of guilt and shame. The tenth book relates how, and with what dismay, the fall of man was heard in heaven; how God transferred judgment to the Son; and how the Son, coming to Eden, "both Judge and Saviour sent," judged Man.

Meanwhile, Satan triumphant returns along the causeway, which in his absence Sin and Death had made ready, leading from Earth to Hell; and triumphant, he meets his assembled host in Pandemonium, and relates his victory. But, as he speaks the place is filled with hissing, and the hall suddenly swarms with fiends transformed to serpents. So God deals punishment in hell; and on earth, where Sin and Death her son are now entered, he lets discord loose, of cold and heat no longer tempered, of wind, thunder, and lightning, with war among the beasts. And Adam's first punishment is the sight of these consequences of his fall. Then follows the scene, already quoted, of anger and reconcilement between Adam and Eve, ending with their repentant prayer; and in the next book we learn how the Mediatory Son presents that prayer in heaven. God accepts the penitence, but dooms the penitents to exile from Paradise. On this errand Michael comes, and we hear the lamentation of Eve before the course of future things is set out in vision before Adam. Thus the scope of the poem ends in reality, not with 'Paradise Lost,' but passes in a pageant before us the whole Biblical history of mankind, down to the mystical and vaguely fore-

shadowed defeat of Satan : in a word, to the point where *Paradise Regained* takes up the story. And at the last Adam, stricken but acquiescent, is bidden to rouse Eve from her bower where sleep has mercifully been shed on her, and the like foreknowledge imparted in a dream, so that she meets him prepared.

"In me is no delay; with thee to go,
Is to stay here: without thee here to stay,
Is to go hence unwilling; thou to me
Art all things under Heaven, all places thou,
Who for my wilful crime art banish'd hence.
This further consolation yet secure
I carry hence; though all by me is lost,
Such favour I unworthy am vouchsafed,
By me the promised Seed shall all restore."
So spake our mother Eve: and Adam heard
Well pleased, but answered not; and now, too nigh
The archangel stood; and, from the other hill
To their fixed station, all in bright array,
The cherubim descended; on the ground
Gliding meteorous, as evening mist
Risen from a river o'er the marish glides,
And gathers ground fast at the labourer's heel
Homeward returning. High in front advanced,
The brandished sword of God before them blazed,
Fierce as a comet; which with torrid heat,
And vapour as the Libyan air adust,
Began to parch that temperate clime; whereat
In either hand the hastening angel caught
Our lingering parents, and to the eastern gate
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
To the subjected plain; then disappear'd.
They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
Wav'd over by that flaming brand; the gate
With dreadful faces throng'd, and fiery arms.
Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.

In *Samson Agonistes*, the latest of his works, Milton again reverts to a subject conceived in youth: it is noted for treatment in the manuscript volume where we find the first suggestion of *Paradise Lost*. But here we can see what, in Milton's mouth, was meant by drama; for he follows no English model, but directly that of Greece. As in Euripides, so with Milton, the scheme of a drama excludes all physical effects of action. Nothing is done, though much is suffered, on the stage; combats are of words only; and the whole movement of the piece is compressed into the limit of a few hours. Moreover, the poet introduces a Chorus, furnished by captive Jews, who intersperse the action with chanted songs; and in these lyrics Milton disdains the use of rhyme. The play has the aridity and the grandeur of some vast desert; yet in a sense it has more of the human interest than either of the epics. For Samson, to whom was allotted a

> Breeding ordered and prescribed
> As of a person separate to God;

Samson, who in his folly had mated with a daughter of the Philistines; Samson, above all, "eyeless at Gaza," blind, helpless, an emblem in himself of the ungodly's triumph — this Samson is close of kin to his poet. It is the drama of defeated Puritanism, drawn from the only legendary cycle of tradition which the Puritans acknowledged. When the Chorus recall in their chant Samson's past greatness:

> But safest he who stood aloof,
> When insupportably his foot advanced,
> In scorn of their proud arms and warlike tools,
> Spurn'd them to death by troops. The bold Ascalonite
> Fled from his lion ramp; old warriors turned
> Their plated backs under his heel;
> Or, grovelling, soiled their crested helmets in the dust,

it is not only of Samson, but of the Ironsides that the poet thinks. Nor is it only Samson who finds himself

> Blind among enemies, O worse than chains,
> Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!

It is from Milton's very heart that the cry comes:

> O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
> Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse
> Without all hope of day!
> O first created beam, and thou great Word,
> "Let there be light, and light was over all";
> Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree?
> The Sun to me is dark
> And silent as the Moon,
> When she deserts the night,
> Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.
> Since light so necessary is to life,
> And almost life itself, if it be true
> That light is in the soul,
> She all in every part; why was this sight
> To such a tender ball as the eye confined,
> So obvious and so easy to be quenched?
> And not, as feeling, through all parts diffused,
> That she might look at will through every pore?
> Then had I not been thus exiled from light,
> As in the land of darkness, yet in light,
> To live a life half dead, a living death,
> And buried; but O, yet more miserable!
> Myself my sepulchre, a moving grave
> Buried, yet not exempt,
> By privilege of death and burial,
> From worst of other evils, pains and wrongs:
> But made hereby obnoxious more
> To all the miseries of life,
> Life in captivity
> Among inhuman foes.

For though Milton lived not among enemies, he lived friendless. His self-centred nature repelled and did not attract. In his own house, his wife tended him carefully, but his daughters desired his death, and cheated him. Their conduct was in-

excusable, yet they had an excuse. Milton treated them as serfs ; taught them to read to him in foreign languages, but would not teach them to understand what they read, "saying with a gibe that one tongue was enough for a woman." Like the rest of men, he forged his own punishment ; but his vices were not those which receive reprobation. Hard, narrow, cruel, malignant and scurrilous in controversy, without tolerance for any way of thought or life but his own, he stands for what is least lovable in greatness.

Of his greatness there is no question. His imagination created worlds, shaped cosmic systems in gloom and radiance ; figured in glory the multitude of angels, the hosts of hell, their dwelling-places, their deeds, their discourse, lifting at every point his theme, as one might say, above human range. And the power to conceive was matched with a technical skill unequalled perhaps by any poet in any tongue. He can make words sound like silver trumpets when a voice rises :

> Powers and dominions, deities of heaven;

he can paint at once the aspect and the very spirit of things :

> Seest thou yon dreary plain forlorn and wild,
> The seat of desolation, void of light,
> Save what the glimmering of these livid flames
> Casts pale and dreadful ?

he can, like every master in this kind, suggest sound with words :

> The sulphurous hail,
> Shot after us in storm o'erblown, hath laid
> The fiery surge that from the precipice
> Of heaven received us falling ; *and the thunder,*
> Winged with red lightning and impetuous rage,
> Perhaps hath spent his shafts, and ceases now
> *To bellow through the vast and boundless deep.*

One can hear the tossing reverberation in the last line ; and note how Milton places the word "thunder," so that the voice must, lingering on it, draw out its natural quality of suggestion. But it is often by less obvious means that his effects are obtained. Take such a line as

> Over heaven's high towers to force resistless way.

Here the verse struggles with the syllables : the words cannot be said "trippingly on the tongue." Or again, in Book VI., the overthrow of Satan's army "into the wasteful deep" is thus described :

> Headlong themselves they throw
> Down from the verge of heaven ; eternal wrath
> Burnt after them to the bottomless pit.

The last line can only be spoken if a tremendous stress is laid on the word 'burnt,' giving it the time of two or three syllables ; the whole force of the sentence concentrates upon it as the thundercloud on the thin flame of the lightning. It must always be remembered that in Milton's hands the blank verse is not a thing of regular and obvious scansion by common iambics. Such a line as

> Shoots in | visib | le vir | tue even | to the deep

may be scanned as marked here ; or thus :

> Shoots in | visible | virtue | even | to the deep ;

but it must in any case contain two feet consisting of three syllables spoken in the time normally allowed for two.

Of what can be felt rather than described — the harmony of certain vowel combinations, the magic of pregnant and sonorous words — one may give for

conclusion a few examples : first this of the architect of Satan's palace :

> In Ausonian land
> Men called him Mulciber ; and how he fell
> From heaven, they fabled, thrown by angry Jove
> Sheer over the crystal battlements : from morn
> To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
> A summer's day ; and with the setting sun
> Dropt from the zenith like a falling star,
> On Lemnos the Aegean isle.

Note how the lapse of those hours is suggested — "a summer's day," with its slow progress ; note also the exquisite vowel music of the last lines and the effect of the beautiful word "zenith." Say instead

> Fell from high heaven like a falling star,

and you have a good line ; but compare it with Milton's ! It is notable too that for the height of this mastery one can turn to *Paradise Regained* ; and the last passage quoted shall be an example of pure virtuosity, taken from his description of the temptation by food.

> And at a stately sideboard, by the wine
> That fragrant smell diffus'd, in order stood
> Tall stripling youths rich clad, of fairer hue
> Than Ganymed or Hylas ; distant more
> Under the trees now tripp'd, now solemn stood,
> Nymphs of Diana's train, and Naiades,
> With fruits and flowers from Amalthea's horn,
> And ladies of the Hesperides, that seem'd
> Fairer than feign'd of old, or fabled since
> Of faery damsels, met in forest wide
> By knights of Logres, or of Lyones,
> Lancelot, or Pelleas, or Pellenore.

Listen to the music of the names, feel the magic of their dim and beautiful associations, and you will recognise in these things the hand of perhaps the greatest of all craftsmen in verse.

CHAPTER VII

PURITANISM AND THE REACTION

It is characteristic of Milton's orbed isolation that he neither belonged to nor founded a school. Among his intimates was only one man of note in letters, Andrew Marvel, who in the last years of the Protectorate was adjoined to Milton as assistant secretary. Yet, though Marvel belonged to the Puritans in politics and religion he shows nothing of the Puritan in his literature, save in his choice of subjects. Of the three noble lyrics by which he survives, one is the *Horatian Ode* on Cromwell, a second the song of the *Pilgrim Fathers*, "Where the remote Bermoothes ride In the ocean's bosom unespied." A third, *The Garden*, betrays more fully his true affinity in literature. Marvel might write stanzas to the author of *Paradise Lost* ("When I behold the poet blind yet bold"), but his own master was the royalist Abraham Cowley. Cowley had succeeded Donne as chief of what has been called the "metaphysical school"—poets who revelled in strange conceits drawn from unlikely sources of knowledge. There is a trace of this mannerism in these famous lines from *The Garden*:

> Meanwhile the mind from pleasure less
> Withdraws into its happiness;

The mind, that ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates transcending these,
Far other worlds and other seas,
Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade.

But as fuller example of this school at its very best may be given this citation from Marvel's lines *To his Coy Mistress*:

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Should'st rubies find: I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews;
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near,
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song: then worms shall try
That long preserved virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust:
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

But Marvel is in no way typical of the great body of the Puritans. He stands, as Milton does,

for the cultured section among them ; but their preoccupations were religious rather than political, and Marvel, whose best known works in his own day were satires (now hard to read), did not write of religion. Milton wrote of religion, but from a standpoint of his own, and the poet of *Paradise Regained* attended no place of worship. The true expression of Puritan England is to be found in the writings of John Bunyan, tinker and Baptist preacher, who knew no books but the Bible and Fox's *Book of Martyrs*.

John Bunyan was born at Elstow near Bedford in 1628, was bred in the Church of England, and carried a musket in the Civil War, probably on the Royalist side. It was an age of very literal belief in heaven and in hell, and Bunyan possessed a vivid imagination, which wrought upon him with torments. During his boyhood, and for years after, he went through agonies of religious doubt ; not doubting the truth of revealed religion, but doubting whether he possessed the faith to win salvation. His life appears to have been exemplary, but his mind forged temptations for itself, and for a while Bunyan believed that he had renounced Christ and committed the unpardonable sin. At last he recovered assurance of grace and peace of mind. Joining the Baptists, he soon showed a great gift of speech, and the Restoration found him a preacher famous through the Midlands. Legislation against nonconformity followed, and Bunyan was prosecuted. He was treated with all possible leniency ; but, since he would give no pledge to refrain from unlicensed preaching, and when discharged was again taken, he remained in jail for twelve years, till the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672. In jail (but in no rigorous confinement) he wrote his spiritual

autobiography *Grace Abounding in the Chief of Sinners*; there he wrote also his allegorical story *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, and his more ambitious allegory *The Holy War*, which relates the "Siege of the City of Man Soul." And there, above all, he wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

"*The Pilgrim's Progress*," says Mr. Froude, "is the history of the struggle of human nature to overcome temptation and shake off the bondage of sin, under the convictions which prevailed among serious men in England in the seventeenth century. The allegory is the life of its author cast in an imaginative form. Every step in Christian's journey had been first trodden by Bunyan himself." The story of its composition is told in the prefatory verses:

When at the first I took my Pen in hand
Thus for to write; I did not understand
That I at all should make a little Book
In such a mode; Nay, I had undertook
To make another, which were almost done,
Before I was aware I this begun.
And thus it was: I writing of the Way
And Race of Saints, in this our Gospel-day,
Fell suddenly into an Allegory
About their journey, and the way to Glory,
In more than twenty things which I set down:
This done, I twenty more had in my Crown,
And they again began to multiply,
Like sparks that from the coals of fire do fly.
Nay then, thought I, if that you breed so fast,
I'll put you by yourselves, lest you at last
Should prove *ad infinitum*, and eat out
The Book that I already am about.
Well, so I did; but yet I did not think
To shew to all the World my Pen and Ink
In such a mode; I only thought to make
I knew not what; nor did I undertake
Thereby to please my Neighbour; no not I,
I did it mine own self to gratifie.

It was, in short, a genuine work of art, conceived and executed with the true artist's pleasure ; and in this spontaneity and absence of intention lies its peculiar charm. The man Christian, who, at the bidding of a preacher called Evangelist, sets out on a journey, leaving home and friends, and weighted with a heavy burden, has adventures on the road which Bunyan describes with the artist's glee. His fight, lasting a day long, in the Valley of Humiliation with the fiend Apollyon has far more reality than all the combats of knights in Spenser. Bunyan narrates it as if he had seen it. And it is not only this extraordinary quality of life and freshness that makes the parable a story which all ages can read with delight, but also there is a recurring subtlety of insight which illuminates strange corners of the human heart. Take, for instance, this from the passage telling how Christian passed by hell's mouth in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, much beset with fiends :

> One thing I would not let slip: I took notice that now poor *Christian* was so confounded, that he did not know his own voice; and thus I perceived it: Just when he was come over against the mouth of the burning pit, one of the wicked ones got behind him, and stept up softly to him, and whisperingly suggested many grievous blasphemies to him, which he verily thought had proceeded from his own mind. This put *Christian* more to it than anything that he met with before, even to think that he should now blaspheme him that he loved so much before; yet, if he could have helped it he would not have done it; but he had not the discretion to stop his ears, nor to know from whence those blasphemies came.

It is another part of Bunyan's artistry — for had Bunyan not been an artist as well as a saint his *Pilgrim's Progress* would have joined the legions of pious and defunct volumes — that his embodied qualities are more real and human than the per-

sonages of most plays and novels. Here is Mr. By-ends, whose principles in his own view were "harmless and profitable," and who came from the town of Fair Speech, where he was highly connected. But Christian and Faithful shook him off, and other company coming up, Mr. By-ends was ready to explain to the newcomers who were these upon the Road before them :

By-ends. They are a couple of far-countrymen, that *after their mode* are going on Pilgrimage.

Money-love. Alas! Why did they not stay, that we might have had their good company? for they, and we, and you, Sir, I hope, are all going on a Pilgrimage.

By-ends. We are so indeed; but the men before us are so rigid, and love so much their own notions, and do also so lightly esteem the opinions of others, that let a man be never so godly, yet if he jumps not with them in all things, they thrust him quite out of their company.

Save-all. That's bad; but we read of some that are *righteous overmuch*; and such men's rigidness prevails with them to judge and condemn all but themselves. But I pray, *what*, and *how many*, were the things wherein you differed?

By-ends. Why, they, after their headstrong manner, conclude that it is duty to rush on their Journey all weathers, and I am for waiting for Wind and Tide. They are for hazarding all for God at a clap, and I am for taking all advantages to secure my Life and Estate. They are for holding their notions, though all other men are against them; but I am for Religion in what, and so far as, the times and my safety will bear it.

Rightly famous is the beauty of the passage which describes how Christian, with his new companion Hopeful (who replaces the martyred Faithful), having crossed the River, approaches the City of his desire, and is greeted by the King's Trumpeters :

Thus therefore they walked on together; and as they walked, ever and anon these Trumpeters, even with joyful sound, would, by mixing their music with looks and gestures, still signify to *Christian* and his Brother, how welcome they were into their company, and with what gladness they came

to meet them; and now were these two men as 'twere in Heaven before they came at it, being swallowed up with the sight of Angels, and with hearing of their melodious notes. Here also they had the City itself in view, and they thought they heard all the Bells therein ring to welcome them thereto. But above all, the warm and joyful thoughts that they had about their own dwelling there, with such company, and that for ever and ever. Oh by what tongue or pen can their glorious joy be expressed! And thus they came up to the Gate.

Unhappily, the last sight in the *Pilgrim's Progress* shows us Ignorance being damned at the very gate of heaven while the door closes behind the complacent saints. Yet one may fairly reject as alien accretions those of Bunyan's beliefs which do not harmonise with the beauty of his nature. The second part of the allegory, dealing with the journey of Christian's wife and children to join him, is, like most sequels, much inferior to the first work.

These then are the Puritans of English literature in the age of Puritanism; and it is noteworthy that they all wrote after Puritanism had lost its ascendency. That ascendency had generated a very different work — the *Hudibras* of Samuel Butler, a man of taste and learning, who in youth won the praise of Selden, the famous scholar. Butler was still young when the civil war began, and was employed as secretary by one Sir Samuel Luke. How the secretary chafed in this position may be easily inferred from the long burlesque poem, which was published after the Restoration had made such a venture possible; for he lets us know that the hero Sir Hudibras resembles closely "a worthy Mameluke," whose name is left in blank, but there are not many names that rhyme to 'Mameluke.' Sir Hudibras and his squire Ralpho have their prototypes in Don Quixote and Sancho Panza;

Butler was a deliberate imitator. But Cervantes shows us the foibles of a man whom he loves and honours; Butler's one aim is to heap contempt and ridicule on the defeated party, whose heel had once been on the neck of every cavalier. The scheme of the poem is of the simplest. Sir Hudibras sets out 'a-colonelling' on his galled jade; interrupts a bear-baiting, puts the crowd to rout, and with the help of his sturdier squire Ralpho (who stands for the Independents, as the knight for the Presbyterians), captures a lame fiddler and pounds him in the stocks. But the tide of war turns, and Hudibras himself, captured by the Amazonian Trulla, is petticoated and set in the fiddler's place. Thence he is only rescued by the wealthy widow to whom he pays an ignominious court, and the rest of the four parts are occupied with his amorous devices; for instance, a whole canto describes his recourse to Sidrophel, the Rosicrucian conjurer.

There is probably no book in the language so much quoted and so little read as *Hudibras*. Butler had infinite wit and ingenuity; he used the octosyllabic couplet with great point and endless fertility of rhyme; and in his own day he was read greedily. The disputations between Hudibras and Ralpho, caricaturing the worst traits of both parties among the Puritans, have now, however, lost their immediate interest; what survives is an assortment of stray witticisms, such as the familiar tag:

> Ay me! what perils do environ
> The man that meddles with cold iron.

Some things, however, are too good ever to be forgotten, notably this passage from the description of Sir Hudibras:

> He could raise scruples dark and nice,
> And after solve 'em in a trice;

As if Divinity had catched
The itch on purpose to be scratched;
Or, like a mountebank, did wound
And stab herself with doubts profound,
Only to show with how small pain
The sores of faith are cured again,
Although by woeful proof we find
They always leave a scar behind.

The best and most characteristic passage in the whole poem is certainly the savage account of Presbyterianism :

For his religion, it was fit
To match his learning and his wit.
'Twas Presbyterian, true blue,
For he was of that stubborn crew
Of errant saints whom all men grant
To be the true Church Militant.
Such as do build their faith upon
The holy text of pike and gun;
Decide all controversies by
Infallible artillery;
And prove their doctrine orthodox
With apostolic blows and knocks;
Call fire and sword and desolation
A godly, thorough Reformation,
Which always must be going on,
And still be doing, never done,
As if Religion were intended
For nothing else but to be mended:
A sect whose chief devotion lies
In odd, perverse antipathies,
In falling out with that or this
And finding somewhat still amiss;
More peevish, cross, and splenetic
Than dog distract or monkey sick:
That with more care keep holyday
The wrong, than others the right way;
Compound for sins they are inclined to
By damning those they have no mind to.
Still so perverse and opposite
As if they worshipped God for spite.

One could easily multiply examples of Butler's wit. But it is sufficient here to note that he

belongs to the older school of English poets. His model is the *Satyre Ménippée*, written long before Malherbe had inaugurated by example, and Boileau fixed by his criticisms, the new canons of poetic style. Butler in his own way is as redundant as the Elizabethan dramatists, as affluent as Milton. His object is to accumulate rather than to refine, and there is hardly a passage in his writings which could not be strengthened by excisions, though the individual couplets are terse enough. He had neither forerunner nor successor ; for though his metre was freely employed by Prior and Swift, these men were fully under the new influences, which began to show themselves in the work of Butler's contemporaries.

CHAPTER VIII

DRYDEN AND THE PROSE WRITERS OF THE RESTORATION

The leading fact in European history during the seventeenth century is the growing and universal preponderance of France. With the Restoration there came to the throne a king, half-French by blood, more than half-French by training. The character of his court is sufficiently indicated by the fact that one of our principal documents for the study of it is the memoir of a Frenchman, the Count de Grammont, written in French by another witty courtier, the Irishman, Antony Hamilton. Probably at no other time could a British writer, writing on a British subject, have become, as Hamilton actually became, almost a classic of the French tongue. The natural reaction against Puritanic repression of theatres and similar amusements was headed by a group of men who took Molière for their model, and produced within a few years a body of prose comedies so unlike anything that went before or came after them in English literature that we may be dispensed from treating them in this book. A knowledge of their work is the less indispensable to an understanding

of the literature because they had no root in the soil. Wycherley and Congreve imported on to the English stage an attitude of mind towards certain aspects of morality which is natural to the French race, unnatural to the English. But within a generation, or less, a new reaction had set in, and the sentimental comedy, in which every virtue assumed a preposterous delicacy, began and continued to dominate the stage. And it is notable that Dryden, with as typical an English mind as ever gave itself to literature, although he had been a very head and front of the offences against decency, expressed with sincerity a remorse which no Frenchman would ever have felt. So different, with no real divergence of standard in conduct for the two countries, are the canons of what it is permissible to say and to hear.

While the French influence upon the matter of English literature was transitory and superficial — reaching no further than did the influence of Charles's court — its effect upon English style was deep and lasting. Literary tendencies are seldom confined to one country ; and the same impulse which led Malherbe to select, polish, and prune, to seek the effect of the simple word put in its right place, rhythm heightening logic, was at work also in England. The Malherbe of English literature is certainly Edward Waller, of whom Dryden wrote in 1664 :

> The excellence and dignity of rhyme was never fully known till Mr. Waller taught it ; he first made writing easily an art, first showed us to conclude the sense, most commonly, in distichs, which in the verse of those before him runs on for so many lines together that the reader is out of breath to overtake it.

Scholars have shown that Waller was not the first or the only man in his day to learn how to manage

the couplet in the fashion which Boileau would have approved. But we may rely upon Dryden for the fact that he popularised the discovery, and introduced the canon which was fixed by Dryden himself and ratified by Pope.[1]

Waller was born is 1605, to a good estate, and sat in Parliament from his seventeenth year. His eloquence distinguished him more than his conduct; a born trimmer, whose duplicity on one occasion nearly cost him his neck, he celebrated in verse first Cromwell and then Charles II. But under the Restoration he rose to a social position as an *arbiter elegantiarum* not unlike that of Samuel Rogers in the early nineteenth century, and retained it till his death in 1687. Many of his verses are addressed to Lady Dorothy Sidney, to whom under the name of Saccharissa he paid unsuccessful court. His mastery of style was unhappily matched by no imaginative inspiration, and he survives only by two graceful lyrics, which will be found in the *Golden Treasury* — the lines, *On a Girdle*, and the song, *Go, Lovely Rose*. Both have a Horatian felicity of phrasing : both, like similar love lyrics in Horace, say nothing but what has been said a thousand times in verse, but seldom so happily. A higher note is struck in the lines which close

[1] It has been noted also (by Mr. Gosse) that he was one of the first to introduce into modern verse a triple measure, in his lines, *Chloris and Hylas*, which he describes as "made to a Saraband." The dactylic stanza is worth remembering :

> Hylas, oh Hylas ! why sit we mute,
> Now that each bird saluteth the spring ?
> Wind up the slackenèd strings of thy lute,
> Never canst thou want matter to sing.

Almost the only precedent is Ben Jonson's song :

> See the chariot at hand here of love,
> Wherein my lady rideth ;
> Each that draws is a swan or a dove,
> And well the car love guideth.

Waller's latest publication, and which were written after his eightieth year :

> The seas are quiet when the winds give o'er;
> So, calm are we when passions are no more!
> For then we know how vain it was to boast
> Of fleeting things, so certain to be lost.
> Clouds of affection from our younger eyes
> Conceal that emptiness which age descries.
> The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
> Lets in new light through chinks that time has made;
> Stronger by weakness, wiser, men become
> As they draw near to their eternal home.
> Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view,
> That stand upon the threshold of the new.

It is a passage which Pope might well have envied; but how strange a contrast to the manner of Waller's contemporary Milton! Note how the metaphors, instead of being, as with Shakespeare and the Elizabethans generally, part of the expression's very texture, are here set out neatly, detached and rounded off, as they would be in prose. But it must be understood that when Waller wrote this (probably in 1686), the new manner was fully established. Pope wrote with justice :

> Waller was smooth: but Dryden taught to join
> The varying verse, the full resounding line,
> The long majestic march and energy divine.

John Dryden, who was born in 1631, and educated at Westminster School, came of a good family in Northamptonshire. He was a boy at the period of the Civil War, in which his kinsfolk took the Oliverian side ; he went to the less loyal University of Cambridge, and it is therefore not surprising that his first notable production in verse should have been *Heroic Stanzas on the Death of Cromwell*. But by every bias of his nature, Dryden was a Royalist, and the poem, *Astraea Redux*, with which he celebrated the Restoration, rings sincere in feeling. In

style, too, it showed an emancipation from the allegiance to Cowley's school, which makes of Dryden's earliest preserved verses, *On the Death of Lord Hastings*, a *locus classicus* for examples of 'metaphysical' manner. Here is how the immature poet wrote of the smallpox to which Hastings had fallen a victim:

> Each little pimple had a tear in it,
> To wail the fault its rising did commit,
> Which, rebel-like, with its own lord at strife,
> Thus made an insurrection 'gainst his life.
> Or were these gems sent to adorn his skin,
> The cabinet of a richer soul within?
> No comet need foretell his change drew on,
> Whose corpse might seem a constellation.

Very different is the opening of *Astraea*:

> Now with a general peace the world was blest,
> While ours, a world divided from the rest,
> A dreadful quiet felt, and worser far
> Than arms, a sullen interval of war.

Here we find Dryden, at the age of twenty-nine, in full mastery of the metre which he was to make peculiarly his own. Yet the most remarkable of his earlier poems, the *Annus Mirabilis*, written six years later, employs, not the couplet, but a decasyllabic quatrain, to celebrate the events of the terrible year which saw the Dutch ships hardly repulsed by the English, and London purged of plague by the "prodigious fire." We may quote the lines which describe the fire's origin, — "in mean buildings first obscurely bred" while the city slept:

> In this deep quiet, from what source unknown,
> Those seeds of fire their fatal birth disclose;
> And first few scattering sparks about were blown,
> Big with the flames that to our ruin rose.
>
> Then in some close-pent room it crept along,
> And, smouldering as it went, in silence fed;
> Till the infant monster, with devouring strong,
> Walked boldly upright with exalted head.

But at this time Dryden was, as he remained from 1663 to 1680, primarily and chiefly a writer of drama. He wrote both tragedies and comedies, and for tragedy he employed the French fashion of rhyme, up to the year 1677, when he produced his first play in blank verse, *All for Love*, a rehandling of the theme treated by Shakespeare in *Antony and Cleopatra*. During this period his fame was steadily on the increase. In 1670 he was made laureate and historiographer royal; and when he sat in the chair reserved for him at Wills's Coffee House, all who could gathered eagerly round the leading man of letters. Yet we may say fairly that if Dryden had died before 1681 he would have been no landmark in the history of our literature: for it was only in this year that he attempted satire.

The extreme Protestant party in the State was eagerly intriguing against the succession of the Duke of York, and, led by Shaftesbury, urged the claim of Monmouth, Charles's illegitimate son. Dryden presented the situation by telling the nation the familiar story of *Absalom and Achitophel*, in such a way as made it applicable to Monmouth and Shaftesbury. The satire failed of its effect, for Shaftesbury was acquitted on his trial, and a medal was struck and distributed in London to commemorate the joy of his partisans. Dryden returned to the charge with a new satire. *The Medal*, to which a Whig poet, Shadwell, rejoined with *The Medal Reversed*. So came into being the rejoinder, *Mac Flecknoe*, in which the great satirist turned from political to literary satire, and heaped his contempt on his opponent, in whom he affected to see the son and successor to Flecknoe, a hack writer of Irish origin. And in the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*, written by Nahum Tate (Brady's

collaborator), Dryden inserted another tremendous onslaught on Shadwell, with whom he joined Elkanah Settle, another versifier of the same camp. It is by these writings that Dryden really survives — by these and by the lyric, *Alexander's Feast*.

Yet hardly less attention was attracted in his own day to a new experiment — the employment of verse for didactic controversy. In 1685 he published *Religio Laici*, a vindication of the Church of England. But shortly afterwards Dryden was converted to the Church of Rome, and justified his new tenets in a long allegory, *The Hind and the Panther*, where the "milk white hind," who typifies Rome, maintains argument with the Anglican Panther, "the bloody Boar, an Independent beast," and other animals. There is no use in pretending that either of these poems retains its interest. But Dryden has been accused of venal apostacy, and it has to be noted that if he turned Catholic when James's accession was close at hand, he persisted in his faith under William, though it cost him, as a non-juror, his laureateship and a pension which he could ill afford to lose — and this at a time when consistency was very little in fashion.

To meet his needs he reverted, without great success, to the drama; and then turned to translation, in which his best work is probably the version of Persius and of part of Juvenal, while his best known is the Virgil. The latest of his publications was the volume of *Fables*, which are modernisations of *The Knight's*, *The Nun's Priest's*, and *Wife of Bath's Tales* from Chaucer, along with the pseudo-Chaucerian allegory of *The Flower and the Leaf*. In the same volume was published *Alexander's Feast*.

It will be seen that Fate has dealt hardly with

Dryden. His plays never reached that extraordinary level of literary excellence which is needed to keep dramatic work alive for readers. His translations have no place in the reading of an age which cares not greatly for the classics, and not at all for renderings of them. His *Fables* are superseded, not unjustly, by the original, for we have learnt to read Chaucer at first hand. And the best of all his work belongs to a kind which never can have for a succeeding age the appeal which it makes to its own. Dryden's very excellence impairs his chances; he writes not of types, but of persons; not of the general, but the particular; and we have from him magnificent portraits of his opponents sketched with a large geniality even in the condemnation. But no one with a sense of literature can fail to enjoy such writing as this character of Shaftesbury:

> Of these the false Achitophel was first,
> A name to all succeeding ages curst:
> For close designs and crooked counsels fit,
> Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit,
> Restless, unfixed in principles and place,
> In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace;
> A fiery soul which, working out its way,
> Fretted the pigmy body to decay
> And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.
> A daring pilot in extremity,
> Pleased with the danger, when the waves went high,
> He sought the storms; but, for a calm unfit,
> Would steer too nigh the sands to boast his wit.
> Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
> And thin partitions do their bounds divide;
> Else, why should he, with wealth and honour blest,
> Refuse his age the needful hours of rest?
> Punish a body which he could not please,
> Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease?
> * * * * * * *
> Yet fame deserved no enemy can grudge;
> The statesman we abhor, but praise the judge.

In Israel's courts ne'er sat an Abbethdin
With more discerning eyes or hands more clean,
Unbribed, unsought, the wretched to redress,
Swift of despatch and easy of access.
Oh! had he been content to serve the crown
With virtues only proper to the gown,
Or had the rankness of the soil been freed
From cockle that oppressed the noble seed,
David for him his tuneful harp had strung
And Heaven had wanted one immortal song.
But wild ambition loves to slide, not stand,
And Fortune's ice prefers to Virtue's land.

Equally fine is the sketch of Buckingham as Zimri:

A man so various that he seemed to be
Not one, but all mankind's epitome:
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,
Was everything by starts and nothing long;
But in the course of one revolving moon
Was chymist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon;
Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.
Blest madman, who could every hour employ
With something new to wish or to enjoy!
Railing and praising were his usual themes,
And both, to show his judgment, in extremes:
So over violent or over civil
That every man with him was God or Devil.
In squandering wealth was his peculiar art;
Nothing went unrewarded but desert.

Of Dryden's lyrics it is not easy to write with confidence. Up to 1800 most critics would have given the palm among all English verse to his *Alexander's Feast* (the second of two odes written by him in honour of St. Cecilia's Day), which describes how the blind harper, Timotheus, roused with his music mood after mood in the feasting Alexander. A strophe may be cited as typical:

Soothed with the sound the king grew vain;
Fought all his battles o'er again;
And thrice he routed all his foes, and thrice he slew the slain.

The master saw the madness rise,
His glowing cheeks, his ardent eyes:
And while he heaven and earth defied,
Changed his hand, and checked his pride.
He chose a mournful Muse,
Soft pity to infuse;
He sung Darius great and good,
By too severe a fate,
Fallen, fallen, fallen, fallen,
Fallen from his high estate,
And weltering in his blood;
Deserted at his utmost need
By those his former bounty fed;
On the bare earth exposed he lies,
With not a friend to close his eyes.
With downcast looks the joyless victor sate,
Revolving in his altered soul
The various turns of chance below;
And, now and then, a sigh he stole,
And tears began to flow.

At present critics are apt to think such poetry as this too obviously rhetorical, lacking in subtlety, lacking in delicacies of tone. But the truth is that the normal unprejudiced reader will admire, and rightly admire, the force and fire of this ode, while vaguely conscious that its appeal to the emotions is conventional. But Dryden is thinking about a crowd, whereas Shelley when he writes his

Music when soft voices die
Vibrates in the memory

thinks only of an individual, addresses only one hearer. Much less of the brass band's resonance, much more of the absolutely genuine emotion can be found, however, in another ode of Dryden's, his noble verses on the *Death of Mrs. Anne Killigrew*, a young lady "excellent in the two sister arts of poesy and painting." From this may be quoted the expression of personal remorse alluded to above:

O gracious God! how far have we
Profaned thy heavenly gift of Poesy!
Made prostitute and profligate the Muse,
Debased to each obscene and impious use,
Whose harmony was first ordained above,
For tongues of angels and for hymns of love!
Oh wretched we! why were we hurried down
This lubric and adulterate age,
(Nay, added fat pollutions of our own,)
To increase the steaming ordures of the stage?
What can we say to excuse our second fall?
Let this thy Vestal, Heaven, atone for all:
Her Arethusian stream remains unsoiled,
Unmixed with foreign filth and undefiled;
Her wit was more than man, her innocence a child.

Enough has been said to show that Dryden is perhaps the least frequented of the immortals. But his mark is set broad and large on our literature, and not more on poetry than on prose, especially in prose criticism. Mr. Courthope has well pointed out that Dryden was the first to employ English with a happy informality for the purposes of discussion:

"Before him literary prose had been used in our language chiefly in sermons, travels, histories, scientific treatises, and controversial pamphlets; in short, for the various purposes of instruction. . . . The reader is never allowed to forget that he is in the presence of his master; he must submit himself to the learning of the priest, the scholar, or the logician. The sentences modelled on the Latin are protracted through labyrinths of clauses to 'periods of a mile,' in which, though the rhythmical effect is often musical and sometimes majestic, the mind craves vainly for the relief of variety and repose."

This generalisation, like all others, needs to be taken with some reserve. It does not apply to Izaak Walton's discourse, limpid as any trout-

stream; it does not apply to Bunyan, who was writing at the same time as Dryden, but whose mind and style were formed by influences of much earlier date. The exceptions are notable. Save only Bacon, and perhaps Sir Thomas Browne, there is not a single writer of English prose of the period before the Restoration who is so often read as these two men — the linen draper of Cheapside and the Bedfordshire tinker. Scores of men richer in ability than either of these wrote in prose but only these two had the happy instinct to write as they might have talked. But their prose was never, what Dryden's immediately became, a standard and a model; for their subjects in a manner imposed simplicity, while Dryden's distinction is that in treating of subjects hitherto consecrated to the pedagogic manner he brought his literary utterance into close relation with spoken speech and the natural flow of the language.

The difference between his writing and that which went before has been admirably expressed by Matthew Arnold through a juxtaposition of examples:

> When we find Chapman, the Elizabethan translator of Homer, expressing himself in his preface thus: "Though truth in her very nakedness sits in so deep a pit, that from Gades to Aurora and Ganges few eyes can sound her, I hope yet those few here will so discover and confirm, that, the date being out of her darkness in this morning of our poet, he shall now gird his temples with the sun," — we pronounce that such a prose is intolerable. When we find Milton writing: "And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he, who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem," — we pronounce that such a prose has its own grandeur, but that it is obsolete and inconvenient. But when we find Dryden telling us: "What Virgil wrote in the vigour of his age, in plenty and at ease, I have undertaken to translate in my declining years: struggling with wants, oppressed with sickness, curbed in my genius, liable

to be misconstrued in all I write," then we exclaim that here at last we have the true English prose, prose such as we would all gladly use if we only knew how. Yet Dryden was Milton's contemporary.

The difference, like all differences in style, eludes definition ; but it may be said, that what Milton writes in prose is hardly less remote from the ordinary speech of man than what he versifies ; whereas Dryden's sentences are such sentences as might have come from a man talking with point and erudition, but braced and knitted together, and drilled into a rhythm, like the walk of marching soldiers.

All his best writings are prefatory to some publication in verse, as Swift noted in a gibe :

> Read all the prefaces of Dryden,
> For them the critics much confide in,
> Though merely writ at first for filling,
> To raise the volume's price a shilling.

They are, however, none the worse for that ; and Dryden as a critic stands high. He praised Shakespeare again and again, with a discernment more meritorious then than now. He praised his younger rival, Congreve, with a generosity like Scott's, which perhaps clouded his severer judgment. But above all, he eulogised Milton, the poet of an unpopular cause, both privately and publicly. The epigram, " Three poets in three distant ages born," does more honour to his heart than his head. A finer critical appreciation is shown in the admirable passage on Chaucer, which may be cited for a final example of Dryden's work :

> He must have been a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as it has been truly observed of him, he has taken into the compass of his *Canterbury Tales* the various manners and humours (as we now call them) of the whole English nation, in his age. Not a single character has

escaped him. All his pilgrims are severely distinguished from each other; and not only in their inclinations, but in their very physiognomies and persons. Baptista Porta could not have described their names better, than by the marks which the poet gives them. The matter and manner of their tales, and of their telling, are so suited to their different education, humours, and callings, that each of them would be improper in any other mouth. Even the grave and serious characters are distinguished by their several sorts of gravity; their discourses are such as belong to their age, their calling, and their breeding; such as are becoming of them, and of them only. Some of his persons are vicious, and some virtuous; some are unlearned, or (as Chaucer calls them) lewd, and some are learned. Even the ribaldry of the low characters is different; the Reeve, the Miller, and the Cook, are several men and distinguished from each other as much as the mincing Lady Prioress, and the broad-speaking, gap-toothed wife of Bath. But enough of this; there is such a variety of game springing up before me, that I am distracted in my choice, and know not what to follow. It is sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that here is God's plenty. We have our forefathers and great grand-dames all before us, as they were in Chaucer's days; their general characters are still remaining in mankind, and even in England, though they are called by other names than those of monks, and friars, and canons, and lady abbesses, and nuns: for mankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of nature, though everything is altered.

Dryden died in the year 1700, and the date may be conveniently taken as marking an epoch, though the men of Queen Anne's day were his younger contemporaries and acquaintances. Save his work and Butler's there is no literature in verse belonging to the period between the Restoration and the century's close which need here concern us; though Otway's tragedies of *The Orphan* and *Venice Preserved*, famous in their own day and long after, deserve more than passing mention. But in prose we begin now to be bewildered with a wealth of material. The work of the great divines, of John Tillotson, Robert South, and others of less

note must be omitted. So must John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* and *Thoughts on Education*, as having, like the earlier work of Thomas Hobbes, Bacon's secretary, an importance in the history of thought rather than of literature. The books of this period that are most generally read had no influence on the period itself, for they were not published till much later. These are the *History of the Rebellion* by Edward Hyde, Lord Clarendon, and the Journals of Evelyn and Pepys.

Edward Hyde entered Parliament under Laud's auspices, but gave a temperate support to the party of Reform, till a breach was imminent, and he, like Falkland, chose the King's side. From supporting Charles I. in the field he was despatched to accompany and advise the heir-apparent in his vicissitudes on the Continent, and during the long exile he was chief of Charles II.'s ministers and diplomatic servants. The Restoration gave a reality to the titular office of Chancellor which he had held abroad, and he was first made Baron, and then Earl of Clarendon. The marriage of his daughter to James Duke of York, now heir-apparent, raised him to invidious heights, and his downfall was completed by the sale of Dunkirk, which he promoted. In 1667 he was impeached and driven into exile, where he lived for seven years.

No man writing from such an experience of life can lack interest; and Clarendon has some of a great writer's gift. The faults of undeveloped English prose are glaring in his work; the sentences move heavily and cumbrously. But the keen appreciation of differences in character, the knowledge of life and the world, and the broad outlook, more than atone for defects of form.

A characteristic passage will exhibit very fairly at once the merits and defects of his great book:

The king's affection to the queen was of a very extraordinary alloy: a composition of conscience and love, and generosity, and gratitude, and all those noble affections which raise the passion to the greatest height; insomuch as he saw with her eyes, and determined by her judgment; and did not only pay her this adoration, but desired that all men should know that he was swayed by her: which was not good for either of them. The queen was a lady of great beauty, excellent wit and humour, and made him a just return of noblest affections; so that they were the true idea of conjugal affection, in the age in which they lived. When she was admitted to the knowledge and participation of the most secret affairs (from which she had been carefully restrained by the Duke of Buckingham whilst he lived) she took delight in examining and discussing them, and from thence in making judgment of them: in which her passions were always strong.

She had felt so much pain in knowing nothing, and meddling with nothing during the time of that great favourite, that now she took pleasure in nothing but knowing all things, and disposing all things; and thought it but just that she should dispose of all favours and preferments as he had done; at least, that nothing of that kind might be done without her privity; not considering that the universal prejudice that great man had undergone, was not with reference to his person, but his power; and that the same power would be equally obnoxious to murmur and complaint, if it resided in any other person than the king himself. And she so far concurred with the king's inclination, that she did not more desire to be possessed of this unlimited power, than that all the world should take notice that she was the entire mistress of it; which in truth (what other unhappy circumstances soever concurred in the mischief) was the foundation upon which the first and the utmost prejudices to the king and his government were raised and prosecuted. And it was her majesty's and the kingdom's misfortune, that she had not any person about her, who had either ability or affection, to inform and advise her of the temper of the kingdom, or humour of the people; or who thought either worth the caring for.

Of the two diaries which give us a very minute

knowledge of English life under Charles II., the first is by John Evelyn, a writer of high repute in his own day, but of no quality that should preserve his literature by its intrinsic merit. One may, however, quote from his secret memoirs (only published in 1819) this account of his friend, who has outdone him by far in bringing to our eyes the scenes and personages of that day:

> 26*th May* 1703. — This day died Mr. Sam. Pepys, a very worthy, industrious, and curious person, none in England exceeding him in knowledge of the Navy, in which he had passed through all the most considerable offices (clerk of the Acts, and secretary of the Admiralty), all which he performed with great integrity. When King James II. went out of England, he laid down his office, and would serve no more, but withdrawing himself from public affairs, he lived at Clapham with his partner Mr. Hewer, formerly his clerk, in a very noble house and sweet place, where he enjoyed the fruit of his labours in great prosperity. He was universally beloved, hospitable, generous, learned in many things, skilled in music, a very great cherisher of learned men of whom he had the conversation. His library and collection of other curiosities were of the most considerable, the models of ships especially.

The gentleman thus described was a good official at a time when honesty in public service was very scarce. But our concern with him springs from the passionate zest for life which prompted him, as each day went by him, to write down an account of all that he saw, felt and did; living the hours, as it were, over again. There is no more extraordinary human document than this record in which Pepys set down his hopes, his fears, his pleasures (innocent and otherwise), with an unreserve which had no veil except that of a difficult cipher. Only in 1825 were they partially given to the world, and since then they have taken their place by the side of Boswell's *Johnson*. For Pepys, like Boswell, seems to prattle, and only upon study does

the reader realise how great an artist is at work — although the art is unconscious. The impulse to describe was so strong upon him that it must be gratified, and it justifies itself in so great a mastery that every descriptive writer should go to school for a season to Pepys. He has a natural instinct for picture making; we have the general impression, the atmosphere and background upon which is flashed some telling detail. Take for instance his account of the great fire, which gives us no vague and remote view of the catastrophe, but brings us in among the very streets, with the hustle and hurry of folk bringing their goods out of doors:

Poor people staying in their houses as long as till the very fire touched them, and then running into boats, or clambering from one pair of stairs, by the water-side, to another. And, among other things, the poor pigeons, I perceive, were loth to leave their houses, but hovered about the windows and balconies, till they burned their wings, and fell down. . . . At last met my Lord Mayor in Fanning Street, like a man spent, *with a handkercher about his neck*. To the King's message, he cried, like a fainting woman, "Lord, what can I do? I am spent: people will not obey me. I have been pulling down houses; but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it." That he needed no more soldiers: and that, for himself, he must go and refresh himself, having been up all night. So he left me, and I him, and walked home; seeing people all almost distracted, and no manner of means used to quench the fire.

After a while of rest, during which he and his guests had "an extraordinary good dinner, and as merry as at this time we could be," Mr. Pepys took boat, and thus describes what he saw:

River full of lighters and boats taking in goods, and good goods swimming in the water: *and only I observed that hardly one lighter or boat in three that had the goods of a house in, but there was a pair of virginals in it.* Having seen as much as I could now, I away to Whitehall by appointment, and there walked to St. James's Park: and there met

my wife, and Creed, and Wood, and his wife, and walked to my boat; and there upon the water again, and to the fire up and down, it still increasing, and the wind great. So near the fire as we could for smoke; and all over the Thames, with one's faces in the wind, you were almost burned with a shower of fire drops. This is very true: so as houses were burned by these drops and flakes of fire, three or four, nay, five or six houses, one from another. When we could endure no more upon the water, we to a little ale-house on the Bankside, over against The Three Cranes, and there stayed till it was dark almost, and saw the fire grow; and, as it grew darker, appeared more and more; and in corners and upon steeples, and between churches and houses, as far as we could see up the hill of the city, in a most horrid, malicious, bloody flame, not like the fine flame of an ordinary fire. Barbary and her husband away before us. We stayed till, it being darkish, we saw the fire as only one entire arch of fire from this to the other side the bridge, and in a bow up the hill for an arch above a mile long: it made me weep to see it. The churches, houses, and all on fire, and flaming at once; and a horrid noise the flames made, and the cracking of houses at their ruin. So home with a sad heart, and find everybody discoursing and lamenting the fire; and poor Tom Hater come with some few of his goods saved out of his house, which was burned upon Fish Street Hill.

Such a passage as this has an obvious historic interest. But on every page of his writings, no matter how trivial the subject, Mr. Pepys gives us what is at least one proper object of pure literature — the very taste and colour of life. We recognise in him the forerunner of Defoe. But Defoe invented, and saw in the vision of his mind, all those details which Mr. Pepys beheld only with the sharp eyes of the flesh.

CHAPTER IX

DEFOE, ADDISON, AND STEELE

WHOEVER visits Magdalen College at Oxford, passes from the gateway and outer court through a vaulted entrance which leads to a cloister, where, above the exquisite range of arches which frame the green enclosure, stand or crouch a multitude of carved figures, some gracious and heavenly, some fantastically bestial ; and over the whole, so rich and so varied, the beauty of conception and of execution broods like a visible presence, harmonising the devout and the lawless, the severe and the grotesque. From this cloister a narrow passage leads on to a broad trim-kept sward, and beyond that rises a long range of buildings, almost inornate, stately and restrained, yet in its classic beauty of proportion a match for the Gothic masterpiece. Not unlike this is the transition from Shakespeare and Milton to the writers of whom Joseph Addison, Magdalen's most famous alumnus, is perhaps the fittest representative.

Shakespeare stands between the two worlds, half mediaeval, half a modern ; Milton is nearer by far to Dante than to Shelley or Wordsworth. Even Dryden keeps in his work some hint of the pro-

fusion and riot which stamped the earlier imagination. But once the corner of the century is turned, literary architecture grows severely Palladian; logic and symmetry rule. And since the best poetry always transcends logic and goes fringed in mystery, fusing thought and expression into one, so that the same idea cannot be rendered in other words, it is only natural that the genius of that day should have found its completest expression in prose. Pope is in reality far less of a poet than Swift.

Further, as the newly-developed art of using prose with lightness and grace proved its power of attraction, we have a double phenomenon — two sides of one fact. The uses of verse become confined: the lyric disappears, dramatic poetry disappears; the best poetry written is written in avowed imitation of those parts of Horace concerning which Horace himself declared that they differed from prose only in the employment of a fixed metre. On the other hand, prose writing became more and more a vehicle, not only for the argumentative but the inventive faculties of the human mind. As the range of verse grew restricted, both in form and subject, so the range of prose correspondingly increased.

Yet, so fixed was still the ascendency of verse as the medium for pure literature, that the men who aspired to and attained the highest place in letters, looked first to poetry as their means of expression; they only fell back, as it were, on prose, at the suggestion, and after the example, of other and lesser men, who had a surer instinct for the popular form. We shall consider first the two discoverers who founded in reality the two main branches of popular prose literature in English — the periodical essay and the novel.

First of them in order, both of time and of importance, comes Daniel Defoe. Born in 1661, the son of a butcher in Cripplegate named Foe, he was a dissenter and a hot politician. He joined Monmouth's rising, and escaped to the Continent till the danger was over and he could set up in business in London: pamphleteering meanwhile with vehemence in the cause of religious liberty. He had his taste of prison and the pillory, but remained undeterred, and at last sprung into notoriety by his tract, *The Shortest way with the Dissenters*, in which he urged ironically the abandonment of half measures, and a frank recourse to the stake and the halter. The irony defeated its own end, for both Dissenters and Tories took the recommendations literally, the one in fright, the other in glee — and when the truth was known both joined in a cry that Defoe should be sent to jail. But even in Newgate he published his *Review*, a journal appearing thrice a week. Fidelity to his political principles distinguished Defoe throughout, but on his release he served the Whigs in no creditable capacity, connecting himself with Tory journals in order to act as a spy. With the details of his journalism we need not be concerned; but this should be noted, that here was a man writing in the popular cause, who addressed his arguments throughout to the populace in a style deliberately plain; and who learnt thereby, and revealed to others, the art of appealing to a wider audience than could be found among those cultured classes to whom literature had been habitually addressed. Defoe learnt from Bunyan; and Swift, there is little doubt, though he detested all Dissenters, learnt from Defoe. But the important fact is that Defoe learnt for himself, and in 1719 wrote the first work of English prose fiction (or the second, if we include *The*

Pilgrim's Progress), which has become world-famous. The journal of Alexander Selkirk gave a hint to his imagination, which germinated and grew into *Robinson Crusoe*. This was followed by other essays in narrative fiction, of which some, as introducing the sex interest, have a more direct affinity with the novel, but the only one of great intrinsic interest is his *Journal of the Plague*.

Robinson Crusoe suffers in esteem from being mainly read in childhood. But those who re-read it with intelligence will perceive that here, as in all other famous books, a great body of philosophical thought lies behind what seems a mere story to amuse. If one wished to illustrate the scientific truth that man distinguishes himself from the animals chiefly by this, that he alters an environment to suit his needs, whereas animals are altered to suit their environment, no better instance could be given than those chapters, the best in the book, which describe Crusoe's life during the period of his solitude. The book is a kind of epic of human endeavour, ceaselessly striving after some fresh comfort or betterment. Opinions differ as to the sincerity of the religious psychology ; there can be no doubt as to the truth of the touches which indicate the desire for companionship. In the hierarchy of Crusoe's retainers, the parrot ranks first, because it can speak words. For sheer power of conveying a set of sensations, all writers agree that nothing can exceed the lonely man's sudden discovery of a footprint on the sand : yet the description of his landing through surf, his flight before wave after wave, is hardly inferior. And for perfection and beauty of invention one may cite the incident of corn blades springing up, as it first seemed, by unaccountable providence beside his cave. But like everything else that is recorded

as happening to him, this seems so picturesque and yet so credible that we hardly consider the art of the narrator. If verisimilitude in fiction were the highest achievement of an artist few could rank beside Defoe.

His *Journal of the Plague* is a curious case in point. It was written in 1720, to catch a public interest roused by the tale of a similar visitation at Marseilles, and it was put out as a *bona-fide* narrative. Though Defoe had been only four years old in the plague year, his father's shop was in a heavily infected quarter, and he must have grown up among plentiful tradition. But he set to work, exactly as M. Zola would have done, upon the sources of exact information, death registers and the like ; and those who think that realism or the skilful use of documents is a modern invention may be advised to study his work. A story told by Donne (writing of the plague of 1603) had described how a man died on straw by the road-side with fourteen hundred pounds in his pocket. Defoe takes this hint and dramatises it into a history of three men who went out from Deptford and camped in a pine wood ; yet, so far had the instinct of self-preservation choked pity, that even here they were scarcely allowed to remain. And of what happened in London itself he gives an account comparable only to that of Pepys for its realisation of life's business going on, in Stevenson's phrase, "under the very dart of death." A single instance may be given of this great writer's narrative style, with his accumulation of telling touches under an assumed simplicity. It describes an interment by night, seen by his fictitious citizen, in whose journal (for many years cited as authentic) we follow all the story :

There was nobody, as I could perceive at first, in the

Churchyard, or going into it, but the Buryers and the Fellow that drew the Cart, or rather led the Horse and Cart; but when they came up to the Pit, they saw a Man go to and again, muffled up in a brown Cloak, and making Motions with his Hands under his Cloak as if he was in a great Agony; and the Buryers immediately gathered about him, supposing he was one of those poor delirious or desperate Creatures that used to pretend, as I have said, to bury themselves; he said nothing as he walked about, but two or three times groaned very deeply and loud, and sighed as if he would break his Heart.

When the Buryers came up to him they soon found he was neither a Person infected and desperate, as I have observed above, or a Person distempered in Mind, but one oppressed with a dreadful weight of Grief indeed, having his Wife and several of his Children all in the Cart that was just come in with him, and he followed in an Agony and Excess of Sorrow. He mourned heartily, as it was easy to see, but with a kind of Masculine Grief that would not give itself vent to tears; and calmly desiring the Buryers to let him alone, said he would only see the Bodies thrown in and go away, so they left importuning him; but no sooner was the Cart turned round and the Bodies shot into the Pit promiscuously, which was a surprise to him, for he at least expected they would have been decently laid in, tho' indeed he was afterwards convinced that it was impracticable; I say, no sooner did he see the Sight, but he cried out aloud, unable to contain himself; I could not hear what he said, but he went backwards two or three steps, and fell down in a swoon: the Buryers ran to him and took him up, and in a little while he came to himself, and they led him away to the *Pye-Tavern* over against the end of *Houndsditch*, where it seems the man was known, and where they took care of him. He looked into the Pit again, as he went away, but the Buryers had covered the Bodies immediately with throwing in Earth so that tho' there was Light enough, for there were Lanthorns and Candles in them, plac'd all Night round the Side of the Pit, upon the Heap of Earth, seven or eight, or perhaps more, yet nothing could be seen.

Defoe differs sharply from the other great writers of his time in that he was low-born, low-bred, and never rose beyond Grub Street. The rest were men who mixed on terms of equality with the highest,

for there was never an age in which literature was so good a passport to social distinction as the age of Anne. Government was still extremely insecure, with a disputed succession to the throne, and politicians tried to enlist all those who had the ear of the public. Every writer except Pope dealt in politics and claimed rewards from Government; and this gave a political tone to the whole literature, from which even Pope is in no way free. The great names of the period are undoubtedly those of Swift, Pope, and Addison; but literary society was then so small and so closely knit that no man can read the work of these men without knowing something of lesser personages, of whom the most lovable and most important is Richard Steele.

Steele was Irish by birth, but bred in England, and he and Addison were born in the same year, 1672, and united by close friendship at Charterhouse and Oxford. But Steele suddenly left Christ Church to enlist in the Guards: readers of Thackeray's *Esmond* will remember the amiable and scholarly trooper. He earned promotion to an ensigncy by writing a poem on the death of Queen Mary (for he was a staunch Whig), and dedicating it to Lord Cutts, the fire-eating Colonel of the Coldstreams. While a disorderly subaltern, he first wrote his devotional manual, *The Christian Hero*, and then turned from this to comedies. Appointed to the official post of Gazetteer, he left the army and gave himself entirely to literature; and in 1709 made himself for ever famous by founding *The Tatler*, which in the next year was converted into *The Spectator*. *The Tatler* was a publication issued at a penny, which, besides news and advertisements, contained literary essays, often topical in subject. It appeared thrice a week; *The Spectator* was published daily; and to both of these Steele contributed

largely himself, and, more important still, drew contributions from his friends, Swift, Berkeley (philosopher and bishop), and, above all, from Addison.

While Steele had been pursuing his chequered and irregular career, Addison had steadily accumulated prestige and esteem. He distinguished himself first by Latin verses, then propitiated the veteran Dryden by a complimentary address in English rhyme. A year later appeared his translation of the Fourth Georgic, after which, said Dryden in a generous preface to his own translation, "my bees are hardly worth the hiving." King William's government endowed the promising youth with a handsome pension to enable him to travel, and in France he met Boileau, whose application of Horace's critical rules was then considered all but final. His pension ceased with the death of William, but in 1704 the triumph of Blenheim gave an opportunity; he published his poem of *The Campaign* and leapt into celebrity. The composition is a landmark, in a secondary sense, as showing what the taste of that age counted finest; and a few lines may be quoted which are still generally known. They evidence, as has often been pointed out, Addison's originality in departing from the convention that represented commanders as winning battles by personal prowess, and also illustrate the happy use of a topical allusion, in associating luckily with the emotions of Blenheim the terrors of the great storm of 1703.

'Twas then great Marlbro's mighty soul was prov'd,
That, in the shock of charging hosts unmov'd,
Amidst confusion, horror, and despair,
Examin'd all the dreadful scenes of war;
In peaceful thought the field of death survey'd,
To fainting squadrons sent the timely aid,
Inspir'd repuls'd battalions to engage,
And taught the doubtful battle where to rage.

So when an angel by divine command
With rising tempests shakes a guilty land,
Such as of late o'er pale Britannia past,
Calm and serene he drives the furious blast;
And pleas'd th' Almighty's orders to perform,
Rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm.

The poet was rewarded, inappropriately enough, by being made first Under-Secretary of State and then Chief Secretary for Ireland. The latter appointment renewed his relations with Swift. His contributions to Steele's papers were formally anonymous, (being signed with some one letter of the four that make the word 'Clio,') but he had the credit of them; and in 1713 he won fresh laurels in poetry by his tragedy of *Cato*, a declamatory piece in the French taste, which was made a kind of political manifesto. Cato, the supporter of a commonwealth against absolutism, died to the applause of all good Whigs, who then were out of office, and threatened with a return of the Jacobite régime; but to-day no man reads *Cato* for his pleasure. Addison's reputation, acquired by his poetry, rests wholly on his prose.

Addison's style was praised for at least a century as the model of what English should be, and it is certainly better to imitate than Swift's, as being much less inimitable. But its grace, ease, and, in a word, urbanity, seem a little trivial beside either the large vigour of Dryden or the trenchancy and endless variety of Swift. His importance, however, cannot be questioned, but he divides with Steele the merit of an innovator. Between them they taught the art of giving light and graceful form to serious thought; and they popularised a type of the essay entirely removed from any academic purpose. Moreover, as Professor Raleigh has excellently observed (in his work on *The*

English Novel), in doing so they paved the way for a literary form of the first importance:

"It is no straining of language," he writes, "to speak of the *Tatler* (1799–1711) and *Spectator* (1711–1712) of Steele and Addison as brilliant examples of prose fiction. Here, for the first time, are the methods and subjects of the modern novel; all that is wanting is a greater unity and continuity of scheme to make of the 'Coverley Papers' in the *Spectator* a serial novel of a very high order. Such continuity as there is in the grouping of incidents round the same characters is due to the idea of a Club, consisting of friends of the author, who assist him in editing the paper, and whose humours and adventures he records. It was doubtless at the hands of Addison that this society, 'too little and too lately known' in the *Tatler*, received promotion to a place in the forefront of the scheme of the *Spectator*. The six 'gentlemen who are concerned with me in this work' are six types of contemporary society, Sir Roger de Coverley, the bachelor of the Inner Temple, Sir Andrew Freeport, Captain Sentry, Will Honeycomb, and the philosophic clergyman; all of them are introduced in the second number of the *Spectator*. Their later appearances, especially those of Sir Roger and Will Honeycomb, give occasion to fragments of prose fiction inferior to none in the eighteenth century. The dreary 'Character' of the seventeenth century, which would have rendered Sir Roger as 'An Old Country Knight,' and Will Honeycomb as 'A Mere Town Gallant,' has received its death-blow in these sketches, drawn by men who loved the individual better than the type, and delighted in precisely those touches of character, eccentricities, and surprises, that give life to a literary portrait."

Our extracts shall be chosen to illustrate this

dramatic portraiture of individuals which only needed to be added to the faculty, already displayed by Defoe, of constructing and unfolding a continuous series of well-contrived incidents, for the novel in its full development to result. It is only right to add that if these extracts show Steele inferior to Addison in literary art, they show that he was at least Addison's equal in the sympathetic observation of human nature, and commanded a wider and deeper range of emotion than the almost too faultless Secretary of State.

Mr. Bickerstaff, the personage who is Steele's habitual spokesman, goes to visit an old friend, and dines with the family:

As soon as we were alone, he took me by the hand. "Well, my good friend," says he, "I am heartily glad to see thee; I was afraid you would never have seen all the company that dined with you to-day again. Do not you think the good woman of the house a little altered since you followed her from the playhouse, to find out who she was, for me?" I perceived a tear fall down his cheek as he spoke, which moved me not a little. But, to turn the discourse, said I, "She is not indeed quite that creature she was, when she returned me the letter I carried from you; and told me, she hoped as I was a gentleman I would be employed no more to trouble her, who had never offended me; but would be so much the gentleman's friend as to dissuade him from a pursuit which he could never succeed in. You may remember I thought her in earnest; and you were compelled to employ your cousin Will, who made his sister get acquainted with her, for you. You cannot expect her to be for ever fifteen." "Fifteen!" replied my good friend: "Ah! you little understand, you that have lived a bachelor, how great, how exquisite a pleasure there is in being really beloved! It is impossible that the most beauteous face in nature should raise in me such pleasing ideas as when I look upon that excellent woman. That fading in her countenance is chiefly caused by her watching with me in my fever. This was followed by a fit of sickness, which had like to have carried her off last winter. I tell you sincerely, I have so many obligations to her that I cannot, with any sort of moderation, think of her present state of health. But as to what

you say of fifteen, she gives me every day pleasures beyond what I ever knew in the possession of her beauty, when I was in the vigour of youth. Every moment of her life brings me fresh instances of her complacency to my inclinations, and her prudence in regard to my fortune. Her face is to me much more beautiful than when I first saw it; there is no decay in any feature which I cannot trace from the very instant it was occasioned by some anxious concern for my welfare and interests."

From this discourse the friend falls into lamentation over the possibility of his children losing such a mother:

He would have gone on in this tender way, when the good lady entered, and with an inexpressible sweetness in her countenance told us she had been searching her closet for something very good to treat such an old friend as I was. Her husband's eyes sparkled with pleasure at the cheerfulness of her countenance; and I saw all his fears vanish in an instant. The lady, observing something in our looks which showed we had been more serious than ordinary, and seeing her husband receive her with great concern under a forced cheerfulness, immediately guessed at what we had been talking of; and applying herself to me, said with a smile, "Mr. Bickerstaff, don't believe a word of what he tells you; I shall still live to have you for my second, as I have often promised you, unless he takes more care of himself than he has done since coming to town. You must know, he tells me that he finds London is a much more healthy place than the country; for he sees several of his old acquaintance and school-fellows are here young fellows with fair full-bottomed periwigs. I could scarce keep him this morning from going out open-breasted."

The subsequent irruption of the children is no less tenderly and humorously sketched, when "on a sudden we were alarmed with the noise of a drum, and immediately entered my little godson to give me a point of war."

More subtle, touched with irony, however gentle, is Addison's description of Sir Roger de Coverley at the play:

As soon as the house was full, and the candles lighted, my

old friend stood up and looked about him with that pleasure which a mind seasoned with humanity naturally feels in its self, at the sight of a multitude of people who seem pleased with one another, and partake of the same common entertainment. I could not but fancy to myself, as the old man stood up in the middle of the pit, that he made a very proper center to a tragick audience. Upon the entering of Pyrrhus, the knight told me, that he did not believe the King of France himself had a better strut. I was indeed very attentive to my old friend's remarks, because I looked upon them as a piece of natural criticism, and was well pleased to hear him at the conclusion of almost every scene, telling me that he could not imagine how the play would end. One while he appeared much concerned for Andromache ; and a little while after as much for Hermione : and he was extremely puzzled to think what would become of Pyrrhus.

When Sir Roger saw Andromache's obstinate refusal to her lover's importunities, he whispered me in the ear, that he was sure she would never have him ; to which he added with a more than ordinary vehemence, you can't imagine, sir, what 'tis to have to do with a widow. Upon Pyrrhus his threatening afterwards to leave her, the knight shook his head, and muttered to himself, ay, do if you can. This part dwelt so much upon my friend's imagination, that at the close of the third act, as I was thinking of something else he whispered in my ear, these widows, sir, are the most perverse creatures in the world. But pray, says he, you that are a critick, is this play according to your dramatick rules, as you call them? Should your people in tragedy always talk to be understood? Why, there is not a single sentence in this play that I do not know the meaning of.

The fourth act very luckily began before I had time to give the old gentleman an answer : Well, says the knight, sitting down with great satisfaction, I suppose we are now to see Hector's ghost. He then renewed his attention, and, from time to time, fell a praising the widow. He made, indeed, a little mistake as to one of her pages, whom at his first entering, he took for Astyanax ; but he quickly set himself right in that particular, though, at the same time, he owned he should have been very glad to have seen the little boy, who, says he, must needs be a very fine child by the account that is given of him. Upon Hermione's going off with a menace to Pyrrhus, the audience gave a loud clap; to which Sir Roger added, On my word, a notable young baggage!

As there was a very remarkable silence and stillness in the

audience during the whole action, it was natural for them to take the opportunity of these intervals between the acts, to express their opinion of the players, and of their respective parts. Sir Roger hearing a cluster of them praise Orestes, struck in with them, and told them, that he thought his friend Pylades was a very sensible man; as they were afterwards applauding Pyrrhus, Sir Roger put in a second time; and let me tell you, says he, though he speaks but little, I like the old fellow in whiskers as well as any of them. Captain Sentry, seeing two or three wags who sat near us lean with an attentive ear towards Sir Roger, and fearing lest they should smoke the knight, plucked him by the elbow, and whispered something in his ear, that lasted till the opening of the fifth act. The knight was wonderfully attentive to the account which Orestes gives of Pyrrhus his death, and at the conclusion of it, told me it was such a bloody piece of work, that he was glad it was not done upon the stage. Seeing afterwards Orestes in his raving fit, he grew more than ordinary serious, and took occasion to moralize (in his way) upon an evil conscience, adding, that Orestes, in his madness, looked as if he saw something.

As we were the first that came into the house, so we were the last that went out of it; being resolved to have a clear passage for our old friend, whom we did not care to venture among the jostling of the crowd. Sir Roger went out fully satisfied with his entertainment, and we guarded him to his lodgings in the same manner that we brought him to the play-house; being highly pleased, for my own part, not only with the performance of the excellent piece which had been presented, but with the satisfaction which it had given to the good old man.

CHAPTER X

POPE AND SWIFT

It has been shown already that although the Restoration inaugurated in England an age of prose, yet the position of poetry as the chief and natural medium for pure literature was still accepted almost without question. For that reason Pope was taken in his own day to the undisputed head and front of English letters. His contemporaries probably felt, as we feel, that Swift's was immeasurably the greater genius; but they held, and held rightly, that Pope in his work was the true representative of what has come to be called the Augustan literature. The two works in prose dating from that period which have sunk deepest into the mind of the race — *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* — were written by men who stood outside the main literary movement. Defoe never at any time attained a place in the great literary coterie of which Swift, while he kept in touch with England, was a brilliant member; and Swift wrote *Gulliver* when lonely and rebellious in Ireland, thinking his own thoughts. Now the distinctive characteristic of the Augustan literature is that we have no longer in a book the

mind of an individual, but the mind of a society finding expression through the mouth of one of its members. It was a natural result of that intellectual ascendency of France which cannot be too strongly insisted on; for the Frenchman is always social rather than individualist, and, at least in criticism, men had come to take their beliefs from France.

The cardinal point in these beliefs was that literature admitted of rules, which had been first formulated by Aristotle, after him by Horace, and finally by Boileau; and consequently, that the first duty of a writer was to be correct; to conform in poetry not only to the laws of grammar and of rhyme, but to certain other canons of taste hardly less definite. It is true that Milton, in no way touched by French ideas, attached importance to the Aristotelian criticism, and that in his *Samson* he worked on a Greek model. But then Milton knew Greek a great deal better than Pope knew any language but his own. In nothing is Pope more typical than in his constant lip-homage to the ancients whom he had scarcely read. He translated Homer, it is true, but he founded his rendering mainly on other versions; he knew Virgil somewhat, but was evidently deaf and blind to the note of lyricism which pervades Virgil as it pervades the work of all great poets. What he did know was Horace; but all that he saw in Horace was the admirable expression of a sententious philosophy, the work of a 'great wit.' The word 'wit' recurs perpetually in Pope's writings; it represents the goal of his ambitions; and he has defined it in a characteristic couplet:

> True wit is nature to advantage dressed:
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.

But the function of a poet is not to separate and crystallise into compactness the common thought; it is rather to link it to infinities of association, to send it out trailing clouds of glory; to show the "primrose by the river brim" or the "flower in the crannied wall" as a single expression of forces making for beauty that sweep through the cosmos. Shakespeare abounds in sententious utterance; for instance:

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

But here, apart from the large harmony of sound, apart from the intrinsic beauty of the words, is their dramatic fitness in Prospero's mouth, when his fairy masque fades suddenly, and he evokes the solemn images of all that we take to be least dreamlike, ending with "the great globe itself, yea all that it inherit." We cannot separate the aphorism and feel that we can see all around it, as we can with any characteristic utterance of Pope's, such as:

> What can ennoble sots or fools or cowards?
> Alas! not all the blood of all the Howards.

If one can assert anything positively in criticism, it is that Pope's ideal of poetry is unpoetic. But it does not follow that Pope was not a poet. That he was a great writer no one will deny. The disservice which Pope did to English literature — and it has been much exaggerated — is that he used his authority to formulate, as possessing universal validity, the rules which it suited his genius to observe. His first study was to be 'correct'; to make the expression of his thought sharply defined in form, and completely intelligible; to exhaust in each phrase the content of his own meaning. Now,

this is much easier to do if the thought is limited in volume, and Pope was never troubled with more thought than he could express. The words of the great poets come to us charged with suggestion; they convey more than they utter. Pope also can suggest, can hint by innuendo; but the innuendo is as definite as the voice of scandal — as here:

> Not louder shrieks to threat'ning heaven are cast
> When husbands or when lapdogs breathe their last.

But he is never, at his best, able to do more than give perfect expression to a brilliant observation, so concise and logical that it would seem to admit perfectly of translation into any language, losing nothing but the clench of rhyme; though here and there some individual colour given to a word might baffle rendering:

> Narcissa's nature, *tolerably* mild,
> To make a wash, would hardly stew a child.

Yet it sometimes happens that the master of prose can beat him on his own ground:

> Some are bewildered in the maze of schools,
> And some made coxcombs nature meant but fools.
> In search of wit these lose their common sense,
> And then turn critics in their own defence.

"Who are the critics?" says Mr. Phoebus in Lord Beaconsfield's *Lothair*. "The critics are those who have failed in literature or in art."

It is seldom, however, that Pope can be excelled in condensation and the happy turn of a phrase. His workmanship everywhere approaches perfection. The inherent weakness of his poetry is, as Mark Pattison has pointed out, that the workmanship often outvalues the matter; that our admiration is compelled for the expression of a mean sentiment, a half-truth, or an ignorant fallacy. To his mastery of style Pope united no store of knowledge, no

wide and lofty range of feeling. When his matter is intrinsically valuable apart from expression, it consists in reflections upon the human life with which he was in contact socially. He is the poet of society, and his observation, if acute, is often petty and malicious to a degree that spoils our pleasure in his triumphant mastery of language.

Yet if ever a man had a right to clement consideration, Pope was he. Externally, circumstances were kind to him. Born in 1688, the son of rich and kindly parents, he was stinted for nothing; his amazing precocity was in all ways encouraged. The *Pastorals*, which he published at the age of twenty-one (though much of them was written in boyhood), earned applause, and two years later his *Essay on Criticism* fixed his fame, and brought him into close personal relations with the leaders of taste. But to offset all this was the abiding misery of his physical disabilities. Dwarfish and deformed, he went through life in "one long disease." The stigma which deformity sets on a face in hard drawn lines of pain is often an evidence of tense intellectual power and resolute will; but it often also indicates dangerous temper. Pope had much of the dwarf's traditional malice, and long-minded resentment. His life was a long triumph, unaffected by political changes (for he stood outside of parties), and marred only by the temper which made him see hostility where none existed, and poisoned every scratch of criticism; so that the most famous things in his work are bound up in the memory of literary feuds. Yet he inspired deep friendship. No letters in the world show a warmer feeling of one man for another than those which Swift wrote to him and about him.

Pope was best known in his own day by his translation of Homer, — the most profitable book,

financially, to its author that had ever been published in England. His most pretentious work was the *Essay on Man*, a didactic rendering in verse of Leibnitz's optimistic philosophy, so agreeably satirised in Voltaire's *Candide*. This work abounds with much-quoted distichs and is singularly barren of real thought. A love-story, the epistle of *Eloisa to Abelard*, need not occupy us, more than the collection of Pastorals entitled *Windsor Forest*. Those poems of Pope which the average reader may be advised to study are first, the *Essay on Criticism*; secondly, the *Rape of the Lock*; and thirdly, the *Moral Essays and Satires*. To these must be added some superb passages in *The Dunciad*.

It is needless here to indicate the structure of the *Essay on Criticism*; any student can observe that it is arranged into headings and sub-headings like the model academic discourse. Nothing could exceed it as a formal exposition of that age's aesthetic tenets; and a single passage exemplifies sufficiently its cleverness:

> But most by numbers judge a poet's song;
> And smooth or rough, with them is right or wrong:
> In the bright muse though thousand charms conspire,
> Her voice is all these tuneful fools admire;
> Who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear,
> Not mend their minds; as some to church repair,
> Not for the doctrine, but the music there.
> These equal syllables alone require,
> *Though oft the ear the open vowels tire;*
> *While expletives their feeble aid do join;*
> *And ten low words oft creep in one dull line:*
> While they ring round the same unvaried chimes,
> With sure returns of still expected rhymes;
> Where'er you find "the cooling western breeze,"
> In the next line, it "whispers through the trees":
> If crystal streams "with pleasing murmurs creep,"
> The reader's threatened (not in vain) with "sleep":
> Then, at the last and only couplet fraught
> With some unmeaning thing they call a thought,

A needless Alexandrine ends the song
That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.

The lines italicised exemplify the defects which they condemn, and the closing Alexandrine is deliberately made into one of the longest lines in all literature. It should be observed that Pope very seldom uses this verse, to which Dryden has a proneness. The triplet, marked above, is also a metrical device of Dryden's which the younger poet seldom employed. Nor is it common to find in Pope, as here, faulty rhymes. But the *Essay on Criticism* is immature work.

Pope was never young. Yet something of the glow of youth is to be found in his exquisite *Rape of the Lock*, written by him originally in 1712, at the age of twenty-four. Its subject was the exploit of Lord Petre, who, for a practical joke, cut off a ringlet of Mrs. Arabella Fermor's hair. The pleasantry was naturally resented, and Pope's original idea was to describe in mock heroic style the water-party to Hampton Court, the game of cards which followed, and lastly, the audacious act itself (perpetrated while the lady bent over a tea-urn) and the ensuing quarrel, in the course of which, as Pope puts it in his epic manner, the lock was by heavenly interference suddenly conveyed from sight, to shine a constellation in the heavens. In this form the poem appeared, making in all two cantos. But Pope was not content, and bethought him of a scheme for adding, as in the *Iliad* or *Aeneid*, a supernatural machinery, revealing the intervention of the gods. His gods were to be furnished from the Rosicrucian philosophy, according to which, as he explains in his dedication to Mrs. Fermor, "the four elements are inhabited by spirits, which they call sylphs, gnomes, nymphs, and salamanders. The gnomes and demons of the earth delight in mischief, but

the sylphs, whose habitation is in the air, are the best conditioned creatures imaginable." He consulted Addison on the proposed change, and Addison advised him not to touch what was "*merum sal*—a delicious little thing." Pope rejected the advice, enlarged the poem with triumphant success to five cantos, and never forgave Addison.

The completed work can be best compared to one of those *Fêtes Galantes* in which Watteau depicts a group of fine ladies and gentlemen taking their pleasure, and depicts it with a rich mastery of style which gives a dignity to the slight and artificial subject. The comparison, however, is inadequate, for throughout Pope's description, even while it conveys the very flutter of a fan, there runs an undertone of trenchant raillery. Here is Belinda at her first arising on the fatal day :

> And now, unveiled, the toilet stands displayed,
> Each silver vase in mystic order laid.
> First, robed in white, the nymph intent adores,
> With head uncovered, the cosmetic powers.
> A heavenly image in the glass appears,
> To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears;
> The inferior priestess, at her altar's side,
> Trembling begins the sacred rites of pride.
> Unnumbered treasures ope at once, and here
> The various offerings of the world appear;
> From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
> And decks the goddess with the glittering spoil.
> This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,
> And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
> The tortoise here and elephant unite,
> Transformed to combs, the speckled, and the white.
> Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
> Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, billet-doux.
> Now awful beauty puts on all its arms;
> The fair each moment rises in her charms,
> Repairs her smiles, awakens every grace,
> And calls forth all the wonders of her face;
> Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,
> And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.

The busy sylphs surround their darling care,
These set the head, and those divide the hair,
Some fold the sleeve, whilst others plait the gown;
And Betty's praised for labours not her own.

We follow Belinda, and "the adventurous baron," among the boat load of "fair nymphs and well-dressed youths" "launched on the bosom of the silver Thames"; while around them hover unseen the guardian sylphs:

Some to the sun their insect wings unfold,
Waft on the breeze, or sink in clouds of gold;
Transparent forms, too fine for mortal sight,
Their fluid bodies half dissolved in light,
Loose to the wind their airy garments flew,
Thin glittering textures of the filmy dew,
Dipped in the richest tincture of the skies,
Where light disports in ever-mingling dyes,
While every beam new transient colours flings,
Colours that change whene'er they wave their wings.

At Hampton Court passes the game of ombre, which is described after the manner of a Homeric battle, in which the court cards meet as champions, till at last Belinda's army triumphs, and the baron is left to drink his coffee in defeat. But chance, or a rival lady, offers him the scissors:

He takes the gift with reverence, and extends
The little engine on his fingers' ends;
This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,
As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head.
Swift to the lock a thousand sprites repair,
A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair;
And thrice they twitched the diamond in her ear;
Thrice she looked back, and thrice the foe drew near.

* * * * * * *

The peer now spreads the glittering forfex wide,
To inclose the lock; now joins it, to divide.
Even then, before the fatal engine closed,
A wretched sylph too fondly interposed;
Fate urged the shears, and cut the sylph in twain,
(But airy substance soon unites again)

The meeting points the sacred hair dissever
From the fair head, for ever, and for ever!
Then flashed the living lightning from her eyes,
And screams of horror rend the affrighted skies.
Not louder shrieks to pitying Heaven are cast,
When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last;
Or when rich China vessels fallen from high,
In glittering dust and painted fragments lie!

For the next ten years (1715–25) Pope was chiefly engaged on his great translation of Homer. The *Odyssey* wearied him, and he left half to be completed by Broome and Fenton. During all these years, as was natural, many a lesser writer had vexed by criticism the thin-skinned poet, and one, Theobald, had done worse. Pope had in 1721 published an edition of Shakespeare, and this Theobald had also published another and a better edition. In 1728 Pope took his sweeping revenge, publishing the *Dunciad*, a tremendous onslaught on the bad writers of his day, and on those whom he considered bad. The throne of the Empire of Dulness, left vacant by Shadwell, whom Dryden had promoted there in *MacFlecknoe*, was to be filled, and for it Pope designated the rival editor. Space is lacking to describe the scheme of this laborious work, perhaps the greatest monument a man ever erected to his petty personal resentments. Nor was the poet satisfied with its first form ; twelve years later he published as his last word a revised edition in four books, when Colley Cibber, the laureate, a successful dramatist and man of really brilliant parts, took the place of Theobald. But most of Pope's victims, described as competitors in the trial games instituted by the Goddess of Stupidity, are only remembered by his allusions; the work cannot be read without detailed commentary ; and, like all satires applied to trivial dislikes and insignificant persons, the *Dunciad* has passed out of

general knowledge. Yet it abounds in superb passages, of which one may be cited, describing a new labour of the competitors after the trial by braying :

> This labour passed, by Bridewell all descend,
> (As morning prayer and flagellation end)
> To where Fleet-ditch with disemboguing streams
> Rolls the large tribute of dead dogs to Thames,
> The king of dykes! than whom no sluice of mud
> With deeper sable blots the silver flood.
> "Here strip, my children! here at once leap in,
> Here prove who best can dash through thick and thin,
> And who the most in love of dirt excel,
> Or dark dexterity of groping well."

But mere technical mastery in expressing unworthy hatred gives no man a long lease of posterity's ear. Pope is best seen as a satirist in his *Moral Essays* (couched in the form of Epistles to persons of distinction) which deal with particular examples of general themes. Here is a part of the passage in which he illustrates the persistence of a ruling passion :

> A salmon's belly, Helluo, was thy fate ;
> The doctor called, declares all help too late :
> "Mercy!" cries Helluo, "mercy on my soul!
> Is there no hope? — Alas! — then bring the jowl."
> The frugal crone, whom praying priests attend,
> Still tries to save the hallowed taper's end,
> Collects her breath, as ebbing life retires,
> For one puff more, and in that puff expires.
> "Odious! in woollen! 'twould a saint provoke,"
> (Were the last words that poor Narcissa spoke)
> "No, let a charming chintz, and Brussels lace
> Wrap my cold limbs and shade my lifeless face :
> One would not, sure, be frightful when one's dead —
> And — Betty — give this cheek a little red."

Here again, from the essay on the characters of women, is a sketch of what many take to be a type known only to-day :

Flavia's a wit, has too much sense to pray;
To toast our wants and wishes, is her way;
Nor asks of God, but of her stars, to give
The mighty blessing, "while we live to live."
Then all for death, that opiate of the soul!
Lucretia's dagger, Rosamonda's bowl.
Say, what can cause such impotence of mind?
A spark too fickle, or a spouse too kind.
Wise wretch! with pleasures too refined to please;
With too much spirit to be e'er at ease;
With too much quickness ever to be taught;
With too much thinking to have common thought:
You purchase pain with all that joy can give,
And die of nothing but a rage to live.

There is no end to the quotable in Pope. But he merits, in all senses, that no one should write of him and leave unquoted the portrait which he drew of Addison, and published when Addison was dead:

Peace to all such! but were there one whose fires
True genius kindles, and fair fame inspires;
Blest with each talent and each art to please,
And born to write, converse, and live with ease:
Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne,
View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,
And hate for arts that caused himself to rise;
Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,
Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;
Alike reserved to blame, or to commend,
A timorous foe, and a suspicious friend;
Dreading even fools, by flatterers besieged,
And so obliging, that he ne'er obliged;
Like Cato, give his little senate laws,
And sit attentive to his own applause;
While wits and templars every sentence raise,
And wonder with a foolish face of praise: —
Who but must laugh, if such a man there be?
Who would not weep, if Atticus were he?

It is worth while to compare this with Dryden's sketch of Shaftesbury. Achitophel's ill qualities

as statesman are first depicted with damning emphasis ; but, as a real offset, there follows the passage praising the upright judge. Pope, on the other hand, leads off with his eulogy, saying of Addison what all the world said, and saying it better : then, after this ostentation of impartiality, comes the subtle onslaught, stab upon stab, with the venom of contemptuous ridicule left in every wound. The passage has been taken, and rightly, for Pope's most typical achievement in poetry : beside it we can put nothing of his but the fiercer attack on Sporus (Lord Hervey), or the close of the *Dunciad* which celebrates the final triumph of the Dull. These are things of which we feel that verse is an essential part ; that emotion so vibrant demands metrical expression. Such other passages as the eulogy of "The Man of Ross," a Welsh philanthropist, need the verse-form in another sense ; without it they would be insignificant. But Pope's poetry, where it has the character of true poetry, is always the utterance of a strong passion — the passion of hate. And he differs from many other satirists, but above all from the greatest of all British satirists, his friend Swift, in that his hatred was not for principles but for persons ; not for man or men, but this or that individual. Literary and social jealousy is the strongest of all his feelings. All the more wonderful is it that the friendship between him and Swift should have lasted out life in both, though tried by so severe a test as collaboration and partnership.

In a sense Jonathan Swift is the most social figure of his time. He had a genius for friendship, a passion for intercourse with the best brains. He was the friend of Addison and Steele, till politics

estranged him from Addison, and Steele attacked him in print. He was on the closest terms of friendship with Prior and Gay, and the suggestion of Gay's most successful work, *The Beggar's Opera*, came from Swift, who advised "a kind of Newgate pastoral." He was the admiring friend of Bolingbroke, that brilliant luminary, statesman, philosopher, and man of letters; he was, above all, the friend of Arbuthnot, the witty and beloved physician; and he was, one might almost say, the lover of Pope. His relations with these men differed not so much according to their stations as their characters; his letters to them are the best commentary on that age, revealing both the writer and the man to whom he writes. At no time has there been a group of talent so united in aim; the social character of their writings rendered literature a kind of salon whose frequenters made their individual contribution to the general brilliancy, but were dominated by the atmosphere. Swift collaborated with Addison and Steele in the *Tatler* and *Spectator*; he joined with Pope and Arbuthnot in issuing the papers of the Scriblerus Club; he published *Miscellanies* along with Pope, leaving the world to discriminate the authorship. Yet for all this sociability he stands out to our vision across the centuries, like Milton's fallen and scarred archangel, tragically alone.

Not even the work of Milton is so inextricably connected with the circumstances of his life as is that of Swift. His career falls into three parts: an apprenticeship of thirty-two years; sixteen years' activity as an English publicist, and lastly, thirty years passed at the Deanery of St. Patrick's, during which he was absolutely his own master, working for ends which he himself selected, and by his unaided pen.

His training was a most untender one. He never had a home. The posthumous child of an English steward to the Inns of Court in Dublin, he was born to poverty ; his boyhood was embittered by the grudging charity of relatives at whose charge he was educated. There was no Irish blood in his veins, but education and long residence in Ireland set an Irish stamp on the character of his genius. Yet he always resented the imputation of belonging to the people whom he so scornfully served, and who have rewarded him with a still living gratitude.

In 1688, then aged twenty-one, he emigrated to England, and was admitted in some capacity, little better than menial, to the household of the famous statesman, Sir William Temple. His ability soon was recognised, and he became a literary secretary to the veteran diplomatist, whose own work as an essayist was remarkable for lucidity and polish. It was a priceless education for the young man, who was not only initiated (as he wrote in an Ode to Temple) into the "juggler's tricks, which we call deep designs and politics," but met at Temple's house the great of that day, including even King William. But dependence was hateful to Swift, and he sought escape in orders. In 1694 he was preferred to the living of Kilroot, a little spot on the Antrim coast. But after a year and a half of this seclusion he returned to Temple, and remained at Moorpark till his patron's death in 1699.

He was then thirty-two and had, as he writes in 1691, "writ and burnt and writ again upon all manner of subjects more than perhaps any man in England." He has preserved certain early verses, Pindaric Odes in the manner of Cowley, which prove sufficiently his wisdom in turning to prose. He had also written, in 1697, his *Battle of the Books*, a literary squib, arising out of a controversy

over the respective merits of the Ancients and the Moderns, in which, by a droll paradox, the champion of the Ancients was Robert Boyle, Lord Orrery, a clever young man about town, and his opponent was Richard Bentley, perhaps the greatest of all English scholars. Temple, who, like all the wits of that day, swore by the unapproachable supremacy of Greece and Rome, struck in on Boyle's side, and Swift backed him with this pamphlet, in which the volumes in a certain library are represented as engaging in a war. The best known passage in it is the fable of the Spider and the Bee. The Spider, with his skill in mathematics and his power to spin cobweb out of his own entrails, is identified with the Moderns; while the Bee stands for the Ancients, ranging freely and universally to bring home honey and wax — "thus furnishing mankind with the two noblest of things, which are sweetness and light."

Temple left Swift committed to the Whig party by the auspices under which he had entered society; and the young man was fed with promises, of which some came good, when in 1700 he accompanied the Viceroy Lord Berkeley to Ireland, as his chaplain. Next year he was presented with the small livings of Laracor and Rathbeggan, a few miles from Dublin, and this settled position enabled friends to join him from whom he could ill bear to be separated. Esther Johnson, or, as he called her, Stella, was a pretty and clever girl, who had been brought up as a dependent in Temple's household, and Swift had acted as her tutor. She was left with a small fortune, and, accompanied by her friend Mrs. Dingley, came to Ireland, and lived in lodgings near Swift, occupying his house during his frequent and lengthy absences. Under these conditions she spent the remaining twenty-four

years of her life — never meeting Swift unless in the presence of a third person. It is asserted, and denied, that they were married (though at a much later period); but their precise relationship remains a mystery.

During the whole of Queen Anne's reign, Swift divided his life between London and Ireland. His first actual publication was a tract, *The Dissensions in Athens and Rome*, in which contemporary politics were formally disguised under classic titles. In 1704 appeared his first great work, *The Tale of a Tub*, to which was joined *The Battle of the Books*, hitherto known only in manuscript to the few. Swift was thirty-seven at this time, but *The Tale of a Tub* had certainly been long in hand. It is primarily a religious satire, and professes to relate the adventures of three brothers, Peter, Jack, and Martin, who stand respectively for the Roman Catholics, the Dissenters (followers of John Calvin), and the Church of England (identified with Martin Luther). The three sons, we are told, were all of one age, and their father had left by will to each a coat; which coats had this virtue, that with good wearing they would last fresh and sound as long as the wearers; and also that they would grow in proportion to the wearers' growth. The coats, as Swift explains, are the coats of righteousness, in which all servants of God should be clothed; and the father's will, which contained strict instructions about the wearing of the coats, stands naturally for Christian doctrine. The primary subject of satire is the corruption of faith at the instance of human pravity; but it was no part of Swift's plan to adhere closely to his theme. Digression grows out of digression, with Rabelaisian extravagance and Rabelaisian fertility of invention: till we gradually perceive that Swift has invented a form which will

enable him to write of just whatever he pleases. Take for example the opening — if that can be called the opening which is preceded by an address to Lord Somers, by an address from the Bookseller to the Reader, an Epistle Dedicatory to Prince Posterity, and a Preface:

Whoever has an ambition to be heard in a crowd must press, and squeeze, and thrust, and climb with indefatigable pains, till he has exalted himself to a certain degree of altitude above them. Now, in all assemblies, though you wedge them ever so close, we may observe this peculiar property, that over their heads there is room enough; but how to reach it is the difficult point, it being as hard to get quit of *number* as of *hell*.

"—— Evadere ad auras,
Hoc opus, hic labor est."

To this end the philosopher's way in all ages has been by erecting certain *edifices in the air*; but whatever practice and reputation these kind of structures have formerly possessed, or may still continue in, not excepting even that of Socrates when he was suspended in a basket to help contemplation, I think, with due submission, they seem to labour under two inconveniences. *First*, that the foundations being laid too high, they have been often out of *sight* and ever out of *hearing*. *Secondly*, that the materials, being very transitory, have suffered much from inclemencies of air, especially in these north-west regions.

Therefore, towards the just performance of this great work there remain but three methods that I can think on; whereof the wisdom of our ancestors being highly sensible, has, to encourage all aspiring adventures, thought fit to erect three wooden machines for the use of those orators who desire to talk much without interruption. These are the *Pulpit*, the *Ladder*, and the *Stage Itinerant*. For as to the *Bar*, though it be compounded of the same matter and designed for the same use, it cannot, however, be well allowed the honour of a fourth, by reason of its level or inferior situation exposing it to perpetual interruption from collaterals. Neither can the *Bench* itself, though raised to a proper eminency, put in a better claim, whatever its advocates insist on. For if they please to look into the original design of its erection, and the circumstances or adjuncts subservient

to that design, they will soon acknowledge the present practice exactly correspondent to the primitive institution, and both to answer the etymology of the name, which in the Phoenician tongue is a word of great signification, importing, if literally interpreted, "*The place of sleep*," but in common acceptation, "*A seat well bolstered and cushioned, for the repose of old and gouty limbs*"; *senes ut in otia tuta recedant*: Fortune being indebted to them this part of retaliation, that as formerly they have long *talked* whilst others *slept*, so now they may *sleep* as long whilst others *talk*.

Swift himself, perusing *The Tale of a Tub* long years after, was heard to say, "Good God, what a genius I had when I wrote that book!" And it has often been praised as his best work. Nowhere else, perhaps, is there such a riot of ideas, such a profuse invention. Yet the book is not easy to read continuously, and indeed is not meant to be so read. Moreover, it offends our age, as it offended his own, by the irreverence with which it handles not only the beliefs of other Christians, but even the whole fabric of Christianity itself. But of this irreverence in the book Swift was probably quite unconscious; and he attributed to spite and to intrigue Queen Anne's refusal to make a bishop of the man who had written it. His mind was never normal; in a sense never wholly sane. It was his nature to juggle with ideas, to look at the world through strange glasses that magnified or diminished, and threw things into new and fantastic relations. But, judged by the standard of his time, he was a good Christian and a good clergyman, exact and reverent in the performance of his duties. Yet, when he defended religion, his defence often seems to us strange indeed in the mouth of a divine.

Between 1704 and 1710 his writings were chiefly in defence of the Church and its privileges. He had the heartiest detestation of blatant infidelity,

and the first great example of his controversial use of irony is to be found in his *Argument against Abolishing Christianity*. Yet in the following passage the finest stroke is aimed not at infidelity, but at spurious religion :

> First, one great advantage proposed by the abolishing of Christianity is, that it would very much enlarge and establish liberty of conscience, that great bulwark of our nation, and of the Protestant religion, which is still too much limited by priestcraft, notwithstanding all the good intentions of the Legislature, as we have lately found by a severe instance. For it is confidently reported that two young gentlemen of real hopes, bright wit, and profound judgment, who, upon a thorough examination of causes and effects, and by the mere force of natural abilities, without the least tincture of learning, having made a discovery that there was no God, and generously communicating their thoughts for the good of the public, were some time ago by an unparalleled severity, and upon I know not what obsolete law, broke for blasphemy.

Tolerance was no part of his equipment. He hated dissenters, and found himself in a position increasingly false as the advocate of Whig principles, since the Whigs grew more and more to depend on the support of dissent. In 1710 he formally joined the Tories, now rallying against the long ascendency of Marlborough's fame ; and Harley and St. John caught at him, in his own words, "as drowning men at a straw." They did right. His tract, *The Conduct of the Allies*, more than anything else, turned the nation against the costly glories of Marlborough's ceaseless campaigns. For the next three years, till all the Tory hopes were dashed by the Queen's death and the Hanoverian succession, Swift lived in triumph, dictating to ministers, dispensing patronage, proudly refusing to solicit for himself — yet always resentful that nothing was offered. When at last preferment came, he was only made Dean of St. Patrick's — a title which

since then sounds as familiar as Archbishop of Canterbury.

Of his life during those years we have a vivid picture in one of the most wonderful of all human documents. The *Journal to Stella* is not literature: it is the secret and confidential talk of a great writer, jotted down from day to day, from morning to evening, to keep him in constant intercourse with the woman he loved. There is nothing else like it in the world, and it is Swift's best justification. Unhappily, it also condemns him. For in those crowded years, the ministry, fighting for dear life, could not spare from their side a writer who was worth to them what the whole ministerial press would be to-day; and in the long absence, Stella was eclipsed by another woman — Hester Vanhomrigh, a rich and beautiful girl, who fell passionately in love with the elderly man of genius, and at last told him so. The story is described in the poem, *Cadenus and Vanessa*; Cadenus being Swift's anagram of Decanus (the Dean) and Vanessa his pet name for "Miss Hessy Van." It may fairly be said that Swift encouraged the intimacy with no thought of the consequences; he liked to feel his power in women's worship of his intellect and position. But it made trouble; for when the political crash came, and Swift, hardly escaping prosecution, retired to Ireland, beaten and disgraced, Vanessa followed, and took up her residence at Celbridge. Here he continued to visit her, and for years the two women suffered the torments of jealousy; till at last Vanessa wrote to Stella, asking point blank if she were Swift's wife. Stella showed the letter to Swift, who took it back to the writer, and there was a final breach. Vanessa died not long after, the victim of a tragic error. She had known, though probably not as

Stella knew it, Swift's tenderness ; she also knew what Stella never knew, Swift's terrible anger.

Anger is the distinguishing character of Swift's most characteristic work, as hatred is of Pope's : a noble anger, fostered and allowed to run into excess, till it became a mania.

For a long period after his retirement to Ireland — where he was at first pelted in the streets — he kept silence. "I was three years reconciling myself to the scene and the business to which fortune hath condemned me, and stupidity was what I had recourse to," he wrote ten years later to Gay. To sink from shaping a nation's policy to the government of a chapter and a chair was a fall like Lucifer's ; but at the bottom of the pit he found fame. The great journalist of the decade from 1704 to 1714 is succeeded by the great writer. He is still a political writer, but not the organ of a party. Ireland, where he found himself, was then as ill-governed and unfortunate a country as the world has known, and Swift was the first thinker who applied himself to remedy her state. His first Irish tract, published in 1721, proposed that the prohibition to export Irish goods should be met by a general use of Irish manufactures at home. The printer was prosecuted, and the jury refused to convict. Three years later came the famous episode of the letters signed "M. B., Drapier," by which Swift raised a storm of indignation against a jobbed contract given to one Wood to supply Ireland with halfpence. The occasion was trivial, the issue momentous, for Irish opinion then became organised, and then first carried a point. Prosecution failed again, and Swift, the anonymous and universally known author, became the idol of the Dublin mob. Then followed his long series of pamphlets, in which argument, remonstrance, and exhortation take on all

the colours of eloquence and irony. But the undertone is always anger — anger with the ignorant improvidence of the people whom he tries to serve, anger with the base and stupid corruption of their rulers. The extreme example is his "Modest Proposal," a scheme (set out with that grave solemnity and minute attention to detail which Swift always wore as a mask) for utilising the superfluous population of Irish papists :

> I have been assured [he writes, after a formal introduction], by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child, well nursed, is at a year old most delicious nourishing and wholesome food, whether *stewed*, *roasted*, *baked*, or *boiled*; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a *fricassée* or a *ragout*. . . . I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very *proper for landlords*, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.

The economic aspect of the question is then fairly considered, and an alternative suggestion to kill at a later age is disposed of, before the proposer passes to the political consequences, which add an irresistible attraction to the scheme. In short, Swift continues :

> I can think of no one objection that will possibly be raised against this proposal, unless it should be urged that the number of people will thereby be much lessened in the kingdom. This I freely own, and it was indeed our principal design in offering it to the world. I desire the reader will observe that I calculate my remedy *for this one individual kingdom of Ireland, and for no other that ever was, or, I think, ever can be upon earth.* Therefore, let no man talk to me of other expedients.

And so by a side wind he brings in a list of the various remedies which he had from time to time proposed : but from all of them, he adds, his new and modest proposal differs in that it runs no risk "of *disobliging* England." The concluding para-

graph is as usual the very climax of the inhuman irony:

> I profess in the sincerity of my heart that I have not the least personal interest in endeavouring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the *public good of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich.* I have no children by which I can profess to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past childbearing.

One may judge how fierce a ferment of the heart finds relief in such expression as this. There is no need to apologise for insisting on Swift's Irish writings, since it was by them that he chose to be remembered. In his epitaph, the most famous ever written, we read on the walls of St. Patrick's how "Jonathan Swift, once Dean of this Cathedral, lies *ubi saeva indignatio ulterius cor lacerare nequit* — 'where savage indignation can no longer lacerate his heart.'" We read also the closing sentence: "*Abi, viator, et imitare, si poteris, strenuum pro virili libertatis vindicatorem.*" "Go, traveller, and imitate, if you are able, a man who to the utmost of his powers was bold in the defence of liberty." Swift has no repentance for his public anger.

But it is not by his Irish writings — which indeed can have little interest or attraction for an English public — that Swift is world-famous. He is famous by that tremendous satire on humanity itself which, by an irony that Swift himself might have devised, has passed into a child's story-book. *Gulliver's Travels* was written in Ireland (it appeared in 1727), but its reference is universal. It had, of course, in parts, a special application to contemporary politics; this we can neglect, but the scheme of the work demands study.

The original idea of the *Travels* was conceived

while Swift was in London, and its execution was one of the schemes projected by the Scriblerus Club, whose other chief members were Pope and Arbuthnot. We trace the germinal idea in the first two parts, Lilliput and Brobdingnag, which are as closely related as convex and concave. The third book, Laputa, is an excrescence; in the fourth the satire, which is cumulative, reaches its greatest intensity. Johnson, wishing to detract from the merits of the book, said that once you had got the idea of little men and of big men it was easy enough to write it. Perhaps Johnson felt that there was a deal better satire in his own *London* or *Vanity of Human Wishes*. Every satirist has to steer a course between the Scylla of ephemeral personalities and the Charybdis of rhetorical declamation, and Swift has avoided this difficulty by what Johnson felt to be the petty artifice of making familiar things look strange. Of his skill in making strange things look familiar, that is, of his art as a narrator, Scott is at once the best and most admiring critic. "It may be said of most similar fictions," he writes, "that every incident is a new demand upon the patience and credulity of the reader, and a fresh shock to probability. But if, on the contrary, Swift's first postulates can be granted, if, that is, we are contented to suppose the existence of any such nations as those to which he travels, every other step of the story is so consistent with their probable conduct to himself and to each other, his hopes, fears, and wishes are pointed out with such striking accuracy, the impression which he makes on the nations, and those that he receives from them, are so distinct and lively, that we may give way to the force of the author's genius, and are willing to allow him credit for an ideal world in which the improbability of the original conception

is palliated by the exquisitely artificial combination of detail."

Not inferior is the art with which Swift as it were surprises us, first into laughter at our follies, and then into contempt. Gulliver lands on an island where things are reduced from the scale of feet to the scale of inches, and the tiny inhabitants exhibit a ludicrous parody of a human commonwealth. It requires some thought to see that it is ourselves we are laughing at, that the Big-Endians and the Little-Endians have their correspondencies among us. But in Brobdingnag, where a tall man is sixty feet high, the laugh is obviously not on the side of humanity. Humanity may answer that greatness is not measured by inches, and accordingly Gulliver is given an opportunity to present to the king an ideal picture of the British constitution. But he is subjected to an awkward cross-examination, and the monarch sums up as follows: "I observe among you some lines of an institution which in its original might have been tolerable, but these half erased and the rest wholly blotted and blurred by corruption," . . . and finally concludes that the bulk of Gulliver's natives must be "the most pernicious race of little, odious vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth." Gulliver is left deploring the low state of Brobdingnag's civilisation, and proposing to teach the king the manufacture of gunpowder, the uses of which he graphically explains in a passage that does not mend matters for humanity.

The voyage to Laputa is the least artistic part of the work. It is not, like the rest, a satire upon humanity itself, but upon the follies of science; Swift knew humanity to the core, but he was ignorant of science, and his satire here descends to extravagant trivialities. But this book contains a

passage which shows in its most terrible character Swift's creative imagination, and the picture of the Struldbrugs, with their immortality of dotage, is an awful foreshadowing of the fate in store for its creator. Nothing can be more interesting than to see how a self-same conception may be diversely treated by two great writers. Tennyson's *Tithonus* is the poetic counterpart to Swift's Struldbrugs.

In the fourth book we reach the last scene of all, the land where horses are human, and men are brutes. Swift is not content with insisting that brutes are in some respects superior to men; he seeks to prove that man, viewed simply as a brute, is of all brutes the basest. Not to speak of the propensities common to all animals, human nature is disfigured by aboriginal instincts which the brutes lack, as, for instance, avarice. The gross savagery with which Swift has handled this text is indefensible, but the truth conveyed is none the less vital. He has been accused of misanthropy, to which it may be replied that a man who shows as much practical benevolence as did Swift throughout his whole life, may be excused from entertaining a rapturous admiration for humanity in the abstract. He has been accused of cynicism, a charge to which his admiration for La Rochefoucauld lent some colour; but the *saeva indignatio* of Swift is incompatible with the easy philosophy of cynicism. He might reiterate as he pleased Prior's motto, *Vive la bagatelle*, but all the while "the corruption of men in power was eating into his flesh and exhausting his spirits." Swift, it must always be remembered, was his own *advocatus diaboli*, practising a kind of "hypocrisy reversed," as Bolingbroke said, and we have always to be amending, from the history of his actions, his own account of his character. Looking at his actions, at the record of his life, we

repeat that Swift was no more a cynic than Dante, "who loved well because he hated."

The end of his life was of the saddest. Brain-disease dogged him from boyhood, racked him with pains of growing frequency; and at last made a complete wreck of that superb intellect. He lived to be nearly eighty, but for years before his death, in 1745, he was confined in the Deanery, and the servants used to admit visitors to look at the white-haired figure, which had once been Swift, pacing up and down. Johnson might well write in his *Vanity of Human Wishes*:

> In life's last scene what prodigies surprise,
> Fears of the brave, and follies of the wise!
> From Marlborough's eyes the streams of dotage flow,
> And Swift expires a driveller and a show.

He had foreseen his fate, and left his money, by a strange act of sympathy, to found an asylum: yet it was his pleasure to distort this motive in the fine verses written in fanciful anticipation of his own death:

> He left the little wealth he had
> To build a home for fools and mad,
> And showed by one satiric touch
> No nation wanted it so much.

The whole of this poem is a good specimen of his verse, which, though it lacks the glitter of Pope's, has more warmth and sincerity of feeling. An example may be taken from one of his many poems to Stella — written in his favourite octo-syllabic couplet:

> When on my sickly couch I lay,
> Impatient both of night and day,
> Lamenting in unmanly strains,
> Called every power to ease my pains,
> Then Stella ran to my relief,
> With cheerful face and inward grief;

And, though by Heaven's severe decree
She suffers hourly more than me,
No cruel master could require
From slaves employed for daily hire
What Stella, by her friendship warmed,
With vigour and delight performed.

* * * * *

Best pattern of true friends, beware!
You pay too dearly for your care,
If, while your tenderness secures
My life, it must endanger yours;
For such a fool was never found,
Who pulled a palace to the ground,
Only to have the ruins made
Materials for a house decayed.

This may be followed by some specimens of Swift's detached aphorisms; but it must be borne in mind that these present indeed his intellectual force and penetration, his wit and his ingenuity, but give no idea of his art in marshalling argument, in the convincing narration of impossibilities (a bishop said there were some things in *Gulliver* that he found it hard to believe), and above all of his amazing irony:

We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.

I am apt to think that, in the day of judgment, there will be small allowance given to the wise for their want of morals, and to the ignorant for their want of faith, because both are without excuse. This renders the advantages equal of ignorance and knowledge. But some scruples in the wise and some vices in the ignorant will perhaps be forgiven upon the strength of temptation to each.

Some men, under the notion of weeding out prejudices, eradicate virtue, honesty, and religion.

What they do in heaven we are ignorant of; what they do not we are told expressly, that they neither marry nor are given in marriage.

The reason why so few marriages are happy is because young ladies spend their time in making nets, not in making cages.

Complaint is the largest tribute Heaven receives, and the sincerest part of our devotion.

Old men and comets have been reverenced for the same reason, their long beards and pretences to foretell events.

CHAPTER XI

YOUNG, THOMSON, COLLINS, AND GRAY

THE reign of Queen Anne is rightly described as the Augustan age of English literature; for at that period, as under Augustus and Maecenas, intimate relationship existed between the men who governed and the men who wrote well. The literary type thus established maintained itself through the two first Hanoverian reigns, though, under the auspices of the Germans and Walpole, literature found itself in no demand at court. The elder men whose mind was formed before the change continued to write as they had written before; their work retained the stamp of that brilliant coterie. But among the younger generation a change rapidly makes itself felt. Prose addresses itself now to a wider audience — the audience which Defoe was really the first to strike with his *Robinson*: while poetry, on the other hand, which had grown so social as to be scarcely distinguishable (in the work of Pope, Swift, Prior, and Gay) from glorified *vers de Société*, returns somewhat to its proper seclusion.

Pope died in 1744; Swift, who had been dead for five years already, was taken to the grave in 1745. Within that period of the eighteenth century, two

poets had earned great reputations by work of the second class, which was nevertheless nearer of kin to what most of us understand by poetry than anything in Pope or Swift ; and two others, though with scanty recognition in one case, had brought back into verse the true lyrical note.

Edward Young, who was born in 1684 and died in 1765, may be commended to those who would study an unattractive type of the eighteenth century cleric. He devoted his remarkable talent first to compositions in the school of Pope ; but the work by which his own day knew him, and by which he remained truly famous for a full century after his death, is the *Night Thoughts*, a series of moralising poems composed in blank verse. A brief extract may be cited from the long passage which is really no more than an expansion of the famous line with which it opens — "Procrastination is the thief of time" :

> At thirty man suspects himself a fool,
> Knows it at forty and reforms his plan,
> At fifty chides his infamous delay,
> Pushes his prudent purpose to resolve;
> In all the magnanimity of thought,
> Resolves, and re-resolves, and dies the same.

Even here one feels, what is glaringly obvious in less skilful passages, that the verse cries out for rhyme. Promised blank verse, we are fobbed off with unrhymed couplets in which the tick-tack beat of Pope's iambic haunts us still. Yet the style has its fascination and its influence, apparent in George Eliot's *Poems*. In her girlhood, that great writer had an adoration for Young — who was even then the favourite poet of the religious and half-cultured households, such as that in which she was born ; and though she outgrew the taste, her own poetry was strongly coloured by this love of her childhood.

Young cannot be credited with the first impulse to shake off the fetters of Pope's couplet. James Thomson, a Scotchman, born in 1700, published in 1726 his poem *Winter*; then *Spring*, *Summer*, and *Autumn* completed his *Seasons*, which were finished in 1730 (twelve years before the appearance of Young's *Night Thoughts*). Thomson's latest work, *The Castle of Indolence*, was published in 1746, after a pension had qualified him to write it, and freed him from the labour of writing indifferent tragedies. In it he showed his devotion to "the poet's poet" by reviving the Spenserian stanza — which he handled with admired success.

There is no particular reason why anyone nowadays should read *The Seasons*. Poets stand at a great disadvantage; for a man who cannot acquire one of Turner's water-colours may still think himself truly happy in possessing a Cotman, or a work of some other of the masters whom Turner eclipsed. But we can all own Wordsworth, Scott, Shelley and the rest, who have done so much better what Thomson was the first to do — that is, to express in verse the charm and suggestions of landscape. Nevertheless, in the history of English literature the fact is notable, that at the very height of Pope's ascendency this young and friendless Scotchman was able to catch the ear of London with poetry of which this is a good example:

The keener tempests come: and fuming dun
From all the livid east, or piercing north,
Thick clouds ascend — in whose capacious womb
A vapoury deluge lies, to snow congealed.
Heavy they roll their fleecy world along;
And the sky saddens with the gathered storm.
Through the hushed air the whitening shower descends,
At first thin-wavering; till at last the flakes
Fall broad, and wide, and fast, dimming the day
With a continual flow. The cherished fields
Put on their winter robe of purest white.

'Tis brightness all save where the new snow melts
Along the mazy currents. Low, the woods
Bow their hoar head; and, ere the languid sun
Faint from the west emits his evening ray,
Earth's universal face, deep-hid and chill,
Is one wild dazzling waste, that buries wide
The works of man. Drooping, the labourer-ox
Stands covered o'er with snow, and then demands
The fruit of all his toil. The fowls of heaven,
Tamed by the cruel season, crowd around
The winnowing store, and claim the little boon
Which Providence assigns them. One alone,
The redbreast, sacred to the household gods,
Wisely regardful of the embroiling sky,
In joyless fields and thorny thickets leaves
His shivering mates, and pays to trusted man
His annual visit. Half-afraid, he first
Against the window beats; then, brisk, alights
On the warm hearth; then, hopping o'er the floor,
Eyes all the smiling family askance,
And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is—
Till, more familiar grown, the table-crumbs
Attract his slender feet. The foodless wilds
Pour forth their brown inhabitants. The hare,
Though timorous of heart, and hard beset
By death in various forms, dark snares, and dogs,
And more unpitying men, the garden seeks,
Urged on by fearless want. The bleating kine
Eye the black heaven, and next the glistening earth,
With looks of dumb despair; then, sad dispersed,
Dig for the withered herb through heaps of snow.

Such a passage illustrates admirably the fidelity of Thomson's observation, and his power of visual suggestion. It does not, however, indicate as well as others what is important to remember; that Milton was his master in style: and the worst defects of his work are due to a superficial imitation of those Latinisms, natural to Milton who could think in Latin, but a snare to less perfect scholarship.

Indirectly, the success of Thomson is a proof that Milton was (as can be otherwise shown) popular

even in Pope's day. But the tragic and total failure of a really original and beautiful poet indicates that poetical appreciation was sadly lacking for any new work. William Collins was born in 1721, and published in 1747 his volume of *Odes*. In 1749 he wrote his odes *On the Death of Thomson* and *On the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands* — the latter of which may be taken as the first indication of English interest in the "Celtic fringe." Johnson, who knew him in London and was kind to him, has recorded an impression of his shiftless and unhappy life, omitting, however, its most significant incident. Distracted by the total lack of understanding with which his *Odes* had been received, Collins destroyed every copy of the edition that he could recover. The last ten years of his short existence were clouded with insanity.

Exquisite passages abound in the longer odes — that *To Liberty*, that *On the Passions*; and they are important historically by their return to free and varied metres, with leaping and falling rhythms. But nothing else in Collins is quite so good as the brief ode given here:

How sleep the brave, who sink to rest
By all their country's wishes blessed!
When spring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallowed mould,
She there shall dress a sweeter sod
Than fancy's feet have ever trod.

By fairy hands their knell is rung;
By forms unseen their dirge is sung;
There Honour comes, a pilgrim grey,
To bless the turf that wraps their clay;
And Freedom shall awhile repair,
To dwell, a weeping hermit, there!

Here indeed is, what Mr. Swinburne rightly praises, "a purity of music, a clarity of style,"

remote alike from the artifice of Pope or the laborious movement of Thomson's Miltonics. Yet Collins is wholly of his time. Very characteristic of the eighteenth century is that tendency to the abstract; and the ode *On the Passions* is disfigured by his belief that you can give to a quality — such as Youth or Health — body and spirit by prefixing a capital letter to its name. Wholly of the eighteenth century also, wholly un-Elizabethan, is the lovely "Dirge in *Cymbeline*," of which the first stanza at least must be cited:

> To fair Fidele's grassy tomb
> Soft maids and village hinds shall bring
> Each opening sweet of earliest bloom,
> And rifle all the breathing spring.

How foreign is the accent of this to Shakespeare, a citation of Shakespeare's own dirge will show:

> Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
> Nor the furious winter's rages;
> Thou thy worldly task hast done,
> Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages:
> Golden lads and girls all must,
> As chimney sweepers, come to dust.

The Miltonic diction and the 'classical' convention have passed over the language before Collins takes it up: he can no longer have the frank simplicity of the prime, that does not fear to make music out of chimney sweepers. "Soft maids and village hinds" have replaced chimney sweeps on the one hand, and "golden lads and lasses" on the other. But set the line,

> And rifle all the breathing spring,

beside what you will in Pope, and the undefinable difference in quality is at once apparent. Technically, however, the most important thing that Collins did is his *Ode to Evening* — a wonderful experiment in the unrhymed lyric. Three stanzas

may be quoted here; and the reader will note at once the true naturalism which renders the impression of early twilight by two detailed suggestions, each of them conveyed with exquisite felicity of words, and each of them chosen because it inevitably carries with itself a whole world of background, which the poet needs not to express further:

> Now air is hushed, save where the weak-eyed bat
> With short, shrill shriek, flits by on leathern wing;
> Or where the beetle winds
> His small but sullen horn,
>
> As oft he rises 'midst the twilight path,
> Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum:
> Now teach me, maid composed,
> To breathe some softened strain,
>
> Whose numbers, stealing through thy darkening vale,
> May, not unseemly, with its stillness suit,
> As, musing slow, I hail
> Thy genial loved return!

Milton has the same art of selection, but Milton is never so much a naturalist (in the double sense) as Collins in his description of the bat. But it is plainly from Milton that Collins learns his sense of sound values. Note the physical suggestion of the vowels in this passage, where first the bat's thin cry, then the beetle's drone is given, before the syllables set themselves to a slow crooning and soothing music. Note also that the poet in weaving his sound-pattern has almost dispensed with the help of alliteration; yet the words fall into their places as inevitably as if held there not only by alliteration, but by rhyme. Nothing could be further from Pope's ideal of a hard and fast prescription which should force every man to march to a rhythm so obvious and so recurrent that no man can mistake it, while by strict adherence to it a certain harmony must infallibly be attained.

But the age was not ripe for such an artist as Collins, and Johnson, speaking of the man "with whom" (he writes) "I once delighted to converse and whom I yet remember with tenderness," thus sums up: "As men are often esteemed who cannot be loved, so the poetry of Collins may sometimes extort praise when it gives little pleasure."

By far more fortunate was the contemporary poet Thomas Gray, whose work, though in its essence very different, has much formal resemblance to that of Collins. Born in 1716, Gray was the son of a well-to-do city man; went to Eton and thence to Cambridge; and after his university studies were completed, set out on a continental tour with Horace Walpole, a man almost as notable as himself. The friendship between the son of the Prime Minister and the son of the scrivener was not proof against quarrels, and Gray separated and came home. In 1741 he settled down to college life at Cambridge, where he spent the remaining thirty years of his existence. The breach with Horace Walpole was healed, and the two best letter writers of their day continued to correspond; we still profit by their amiable labours. They had many tastes in common; but Walpole was a dilettante and an amateur, Gray a scholar in the widest sense. He was, perhaps, the first man in Europe to realise the value of the Scandinavian sagas; and his famous ode, *The Bard*, showed an interest in the literary records of Wales like that which Gaelic traditions awakened in Collins. He had, moreover, a delightful humour, which pervades his letters and informs one charming piece of verse, the lines on a cat drowned in attempting to poach on a jar of goldfish.

To the average reader, however, he is of course

chiefly the author of the *Hymn to Adversity*, the odes, *On the Spring*, *On a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, *The Bard*, and, above all, of *The Elegy in a Country Churchyard*. It may be fairly said that nearly all his original verse is known to everybody. Few poets travel with so little luggage, and Gray is represented almost *in extenso* in almost every anthology. Yet his tremendous lampoon on the first Lord Holland's absurd castle at Kingsgate deserves to be more familiar than it is: better satiric verse is hardly to be found in Pope or Dryden than these vigorous quatrains.

We need not perhaps lament with Matthew Arnold that Gray "never spoke out." It is true the time was unfavourable for poetry, but Collins rather than Gray felt the nip of the "spiritual east wind." The simple fact that Gray deliberately chose to spend his life in the safe and stagnant atmosphere of a university town — then far less ruffled by outside currents than it is to-day — proves him lacking in the venturesome ardour which no great poet can be without. There is no trace in him of any generous indiscretion, such as, for instance, moved Tennyson to the project of volunteering with the Spanish rebels. His muse is essentially academic. Even the swan song which the Welsh bard, last of his order, chants before he plunges from the precipice is simply a prophetic review of English history and literature, which, in reality, celebrates the glories of the conqueror; and Gray's best ode, *The Progress of Poesy*, may be not quite unfairly described as lyrical criticism.

It opens with three fine stanzas which describe the power of poetry to inspire joy, and two which celebrate its consoling and invigorating influence. Then the progress of the muses is traced from Greece to Rome, and from Rome to "Albion's sea-

encircled coast." A stanza is given to Shakespeare, commonplace enough ; but the verse then mounts to a pitch worthy of its subject to honour Milton and Dryden, before it falls to the lamentably tame conclusion, in which Gray makes his estimate of his own work :

Nor second He, that rode sublime
Upon the seraph-wings of Ecstasy,
The secrets of the abyss to spy.
He passed the flaming bounds of place and time :
The living throne, the sapphire blaze,
Where angels tremble while they gaze,
He saw; but, blasted with excess of light,
Closed his eyes in endless night.
Behold, where Dryden's less presumptuous car,
Wide o'er the field of glory bear
Two coursers of ethereal race,
With necks in thunder clothed, and long-resounding pace.

Hark, his hands the lyre explore !
Bright-eyed Fancy, hovering o'er,
Scatters from her pictured urn
Thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.
But ah ! 'tis heard no more —
Oh lyre divine, what daring spirit
Wakes thee now? Tho' he inherit
Nor the pride, nor ample pinion,
That the Theban eagle bear,
Sailing with supreme dominion
Thro' the azure deep of air :
Yet oft before his infant eyes would run
Such forms as glitter in the Muse's ray,
With orient hues, unborrowed of the sun :
Yet shall he mount, and keep his distant way
Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate,
Beneath the Good how far — but far above the Great.

Fine as it all is, one cannot but feel that it somehow lacks feeling, and savours of the glorified prize poem. The spectacle of Milton fires Gray for a moment, though the alien emotion, experienced, as it were, at second-hand, drops and leaves him in the rhetorical ingenuity "blasted with excess of

light." Compare this with the sincere poetry of Milton's own sonnet on his blindness, or compare it with the truth of fact, and rhetoric at once loses its lustre. Milton lost his eyes, not in contemplating hell or heaven, but because he turned from these contemplations to scrive and pore in the service of his country. The lines on Dryden express finely a critical eulogy of the heroic couplet, and exemplify Dryden's use of the Alexandrine, but this is only one step further from prose than the best things in Pope's *Essay on Criticism*. Where we find Gray the true, the sincere poet, is in the meditative stanzas of the *Ode on Eton*, and above all in the imperishable *Elegy*. Poetry, Milton said, should be "simple, sensuous, and passionate," and Gray seldom stands the test. But in the opening stanzas of the *Ode on Eton* we have an emotion — the regret for early youth — which is simple, common to many of mankind; and we have it associated with definite sense perceptions, the towers of Windsor and the rich beauty of the Thames and its banks. Passion is lacking; and in the latter part of the ode we have a spurious rhetoric in the detailed forecast of the "fury Passions" that are to prey upon the "little victims" (in other words, the Eton boys) when they reach manhood.

It is in the *Elegy* that Gray is wholly exempt from insincerity. In its magical opening we have again the simplicity of great art in the broad, bold strokes, the appeal to common experience, the full sensuous realisation of the scene conveyed, and beyond that, a passion of feeling, a whole nature vibrant. What the passion is under which the nature vibrates, we do not learn at once. We follow through stanza after stanza of magnificent embroidery upon the theme, as thought after thought rises to the mind's surface, presented only to be

dismissed. Thus are evoked the pageantry of death in other places, "pealing anthems" under long drawn aisle and fretted vault; the wastage of life in "village Hampdens" and "mute inglorious Miltons"; the glory that might have been, the compensations for its lack in the cool sequestered vale. All these thoughts are alien to the heart of the poem; it is with a "Yet" that we reach the central emotion, — that passionate clinging to the known and homely, that passionate repugnance from the chilly silence, which no man was more likely to understand than Johnson, and which is rendered in stanzas that he — who disliked Gray — has praised once and for all in a famous passage:

> In the character of his *Elegy* I rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common-sense of readers, uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtlety and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical honours. The "Churchyard" abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. The four stanzas, beginning "Yet even these bones," are to me original; I have never seen the notions in any other place; yet he that reads them here persuades himself that he has always felt them. Had Gray written often thus, it had been vain to blame and useless to praise him.

CHAPTER XII

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY NOVELISTS

HUMAN beings in a civilised society have everywhere and always demanded to be entertained by fiction; and in England the demand had been met most successfully by dramatic fiction, for which the genius of the race, in a brilliant period, had shown itself specially favourable. After the Puritan influence, hostile to the theatre, had become, what it has never wholly ceased to be, the dominant characteristic of English life, fiction was still called for, and instead of going to see plays, people read them. But in so far as a play is the telling of a story, it needs to be acted for its full effect; and a great field lay open for the writer of a story who, instead of casting it into dramatic form, would tell it primarily as a narrative; describing what on the stage would be seen enacted, suggesting a background by words, and interpolating dramatic dialogue when occasion offered. Defoe, as we have seen, did this; yet not for a long time was the lesson really grasped; and the novel, in so far as it is a story of domestic interest hinging on a love affair, was born, so to say, by accident.

Samuel Richardson, a fat, short, elderly bookseller

and printer, was asked by certain other booksellers to prepare a series "of familiar letters on the useful concerns in common life," which should serve partly as a work of moral example and partly as a guide to letter writing. With no loftier purpose did Richardson begin; and he wrote letters purporting to come from a servant-maid — that being the class for whom the book was designed to be specially useful. The letters had to be about something, so he bethought him of a story which he had heard about a young woman in service whom her master had endeavoured to seduce, and who had not only successfully guarded her virtue, but had finally triumphed over the would-be seducer's heart till he condescended to make her his wife.

It seems that Richardson when a precocious boy had taken an interest in the love affairs of young women, who employed him to put into words the sentiments which they desired to express to their lovers. This early practice stood to him, and when his book *Pamela* appeared (in 1740), narrating in a series of epistles the history of Pamela's trials and triumph, it took the town by storm. Its successor, *Clarissa Harlowe*, set Richardson on a well-deserved pinnacle; and those who have read *Sir Charles Grandison*, his third and last novel, in which he essayed to depict the perfect gentleman — a blameless baronet — declare that it does not detract from his reputation. The ordinary reader may well be content with the eight solid volumes of *Clarissa*, which is unquestionably one of the best novels in any language.

Unfortunately, standards have so far changed that what was accounted in 1749 to be the most edifying of sermons cannot now be discussed unreservedly. Clarissa is a beautiful, pious, accomplished young lady with a despotic father, a weak

mother, and a brother and a sister who detest her because of her personal pre-eminence and of a rich legacy which it has secured to her. To her Mr. Lovelace, a man of rank and fashion, witty, handsome, and dangerous, comes to pay his addresses — having unfortunately first paid them to the elder sister, whom, after seeing Clarissa, he leads on to refuse him — though her refusal is given in a manner designed rather for an encouragement. The sister, thus outmanoeuvred, is furious, and summons the brother to her aid, who persistently insults Lovelace; and Clarissa is led into a clandestine correspondence with the purpose of avoiding a duel. It is impossible to describe the never-dull series of touches which reveal how the interest awakened by this brilliant personage in Clarissa is re-enforced while she is increasingly obliged to occupy her thoughts with him, and how she is led from one concession to another in the interests of peace. Finally the duel occurs, and Lovelace, the magnanimous victor, is forbidden the house; Clarissa is put under more and more insulting restrictions; her correspondence not only with him but with her confidant, Miss Howe, is conducted by ever fresh intrigue ; and we see her being slowly and inevitably driven to accept in perfect good faith the proposal of elopement, which he holds out with the worst designs. We see also, through his letters to his confidant, Mr. Belford, the pulling of the wires, the means by which he goads on her family to more intolerable severities, playing on the foible of each ; till at last Clarissa takes the plunge, as the only alternative to a detested marriage into which her relatives are trying to force her. In this way the minds of half-a-dozen principal actors, to say nothing of subalterns, are laid open to us; and we have not the minds only, but their tricks of voice and

gesture. It is not a pleasant interior that is thus disclosed; the passion of mean, rancorous spite, finely discriminated in its male and female effects in brother and sister; the father's despotism, the mother's foolish subservience to an absurd ideal of conjugal duty, the fussy incompetence of two uncles, — all this is unsparingly shown as well as Clarissa's attitude to each of these her kin. But this is only the opening, for the real story begins when Clarissa flies, only to find that her lover has no thought of marriage; and her letters, and his, detail the various stratagems by which he seeks, ineffectually, to prevail over her resistance. The book ends in tragedy; Clarissa is outraged by the foulest of foul play, and dies; Lovelace is killed in a duel; and so the infinitely drawn-out tension comes to an end.

Perhaps nowhere else in literature is there so minute an analysis of the feminine temperament — and Miss Howe is scarcely less fully revealed than Clarissa. But the wonder of the thing is that this prim little bookseller, who surrounded himself naturally with elderly women, should have drawn in Lovelace a man whose name has most justly been given to a type of bold and picturesque villainy.

Two citations may be given which illustrate, however inadequately, Richardson's power of conveying a scene and a physical impression. The first is from a letter of Clarissa's:

> . . . My sister is but this moment gone from me. She came up all in a flame; which obliged me abruptly to lay down my pen; she ran to me —
>
> O Spirit! said she, tapping my neck a little *too* hard. And it is come to this at last!
>
> Do you beat me, Bella?
>
> Do you call this beating you? only tapping your shoulder thus, said she, tapping again more gently — this is what we expected it would come to — you want to be independent — my father has lived too long for you!

I was going to speak with vehemence; but she put her handkerchief before my mouth, very rudely — You have done enough with your pen, mean listener as you are! But know that neither your independent scheme, nor any of your visiting ones, will be granted you. Take your course, perverse one! Call in your rake to help you to an independence upon your parents, and a dependence upon him! — Do so! — Prepare this moment — resolve what you will take with you — to-morrow you go — depend upon it to-morrow you go! — No longer shall you stay here, watching and creeping about to hearken to what people say. — 'Tis determined, child! — You go to-morrow — my brother would have come up to tell you so; but I persuaded him to the contrary — for I know not what had become of you if he had. — Such a letter! such an insolent, such a conceited challenger! Oh thou vain creature! But prepare yourself, I say — to-morrow you go — my brother will accept of your bold challenge; but it must be personal: and at my uncle Antony's — or perhaps at Mr. Solmes's —

Thus she ran on, almost foaming with passion; till, quite out of patience, I said, No more of your violence, Bella. — Had I known in what way you designed to come up, you should not have found my chamber-door open — talk to your servant in this manner. Unlike you, as I bless God I am, I am nevertheless your sister — and let me tell you that I won't go to-morrow, nor the next day, nor next day to that — except I am dragged away by violence.

What! not if your father or your mother command it — Girl! said she, intending another word, by her pause and manner before it came out.

Let it come to that, Bella; then I shall know what to say. But it shall be from their own mouths, if I do — not from yours, nor your Betty's. — And say another word to me, in this manner, and be the consequence what it may, I will force myself into their presence; and demand what I have done to be used thus!

Come along, child! Come along, Meekness — taking my hand, and leading me towards the door — Demand it of them now — you'll find both your despised parents together! — What! does your heart fail you? — for I resisted being thus insolently offered to be led, and pulled my hand from her.

I want not to be led, said I; and since I can plead your invitation, I will go: and was posting to the stairs accordingly in my passion — but she got between me and the door, and shut it —

Let me first, bold one, said she, apprise them of your visit

— for your own sake let me — for my brother is with them. But yet opening it again, seeing me shrink back — Go, if you will! — Why don't you go? — Why don't you go, Miss? — following me to my closet, whither I retired, with my heart full, and pulled the sash-door after me; and could no longer hold in my tears.

Nor would I answer one word to her repeated aggravations, nor to her demands upon me to open the door (for the key was on the inside); nor so much as turn my head towards her, as she looked through the glass at me. And at last, which vexed her to the heart, I drew the silk curtain that she should not see me, and down she went muttering all the way.

Is not this usage enough to provoke a rashness never before thought of?

As it is but too probable that I may be hurried away to uncle's without being able to give you previous notice of it; I beg you that as soon as you shall hear of such a violence, you would send to the usual place, to take back such of your letters as may not have reached my hands, or to fetch any of mine that may be there. — May you, my dear, be always happy, prays your CLARISSA HARLOWE.

And here now is a specimen of Lovelace's correspondence with Mr. Belford:

Just as she had repeated the last words, "If you mean me honourably, let me go out of this hated house," in came Mrs. Sinclair, in a great ferment — And what, pray, Madam, has this house done to you? Mr. Lovelace, you have known me some time; and if I have not the niceness of this lady, I hope I do not deserve to be treated thus?

She set her huge arms akimbo — Hoh! Madam, let me tell you that I am amazed at your freedoms with my character! And, Mr. Lovelace (holding up and violently shaking her head), if you are a gentleman and a man of honour —

Having never before seen anything but obsequiousness in this woman, little as she liked her, she was frighted at her masculine air and fierce look — God help me! she cried, what will become of me now! then, turning her head hither and thither, in a wild kind of amaze, Whom have I found protector! What will become of me now!

I will be your protector, my dearest love! — But indeed you are uncharitably severe upon poor Mrs. Sinclair! Indeed you are! — She is a gentlewoman born, and the relict of a man of honour; and though left in such circumstances as to

oblige her to let lodgings, yet would she scorn to be guilty of a wilful baseness.

I hope so — it may be so — I may be mistaken — but — but there is no crime, I presume, no treason to say I don't like her house.

The old dragon straddled up to her, with her arms kimboed again, her eye-brows erect, like the bristles upon a hog's back, and scowling over her shortened nose, more than half hid her ferret eyes. Her mouth was distorted. She pouted out her blubber-lips, as if to bellows up wind and sputter into her horse-nostrils; and her chin was curdled, and more than usually prominent with passion.

With two "Hoh — Madams," she accosted the frighted fair one; who, terrified, caught hold of my sleeve.

I feared she would fall into fits; and with a look of indignation, told Mrs. Sinclair that these apartments were mine; and I could not imagine what she meant, either by listening to what passed between me and my spouse, or to come in uninvited; and still more I wondered at her giving herself these strange liberties.

I may be to blame, Jack, for suffering this wretch to give herself these airs; but her coming in was without my orders.

The old beldam, throwing herself into a chair, fell a blubbering and exclaiming. And the pacifying of her, and endeavouring to reconcile the lady to her, took up till near one o'clock.

And thus, between terror, and the late hour, and what followed, she was diverted from the thoughts of getting out of the house to Mrs. Leeson's, or anywhere else.

The epistolary style, to which Richardson adhered throughout, has a natural fitness for full self-revelation; but many drawbacks offset this advantage. The same event has to be many times related or referred to; the evolution of plot is necessarily slow; and, above all, the author is debarred from commenting in his own person. A very different model of narrative was afforded by the great writer who owed to Richardson the immediate suggestion of his first masterpiece.

Pamela appeared in 1740; and among those who were no enthusiasts for her well-invested virtues

must have been Mr. Henry Fielding, barrister-at-law, and a playwright of some standing. Two years later there was published *The History of Joseph Andrews and his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams*. The first intention of this book was parody. Joseph Andrews was represented as being brother of Pamela, and, like her, possessed of great personal attractions. Like her, also, he is subjected to temptation by an employer; like her he resists. But there the resemblance ends. For, in the first place, Mr. Joseph is not bent on keeping Lady Booby at a distance till she shall decide on marriage; on the contrary, the object of his ambition is to become the husband of Fanny, a pretty and portionless young girl in his native parish. And accordingly, when her slighted ladyship in natural anger turns the lad out of doors, his first thought is to betake himself home. Unhappily, however, before he got far on his way, he had the misfortune to be stopped, robbed, stripped, and left for dead. What followed is so characteristic of Fielding's manner, that it may be quoted:

> The poor wretch, who lay motionless a long time, just began to recover his senses as a stage-coach came by. The postilion, hearing a man's groans, stopt his horses, and told the coachman, he was certain there was a dead man lying in the ditch, for he heard him groan. "Go on, sirrah," says the coachman; "we are confounded late, and have no time to look after dead men." A lady, who heard what the postilion said, and likewise heard the groan, called eagerly to the coachman to stop and see what was the matter. Upon which he bids the postilion alight, and look into the ditch. He did so, and returned, "that there was a man sitting upright, as naked as ever he was born." — "O J—sus!" cried the lady; "A naked man! Dear coachman, drive on and leave him." Upon this the gentlemen got out of the coach; and Joseph begged them to have mercy upon him: for that he had been robbed, and almost beaten to death. "Robbed!" cries an old gentleman: "let us make all the haste imaginable, or we shall be robbed too." A young man who belonged to the law answered, "He wished they had passed by without

taking any notice; but that now they might be proved to have been last in his company; if he should die they might be called to some account for his murder. He therefore thought it advisable to save the poor creature's life, for their own sakes, if possible; at least, if he died, to prevent the jury's finding that they fled for it. He was therefore of opinion to take the man into the coach, and carry him to the next inn." The lady insisted, "That he should not come into the coach. That if they lifted him in, she would herself alight: for she had rather stay in that place to all eternity, than ride with a naked man." The coachman objected, "That he could not suffer him to be taken in, unless somebody would pay a shilling for his carriage the four miles, which the two gentlemen refused to do. But the lawyer, who was afraid of some mischief happening to himself if the wretch was left behind in that condition, saying, No man could be too cautious in these matters, and that he remembered very extraordinary cases in the books, threatened the coachman, and bid him deny taking him up at his peril; for that if he died, he should be indicted for his murder; and if he lived, and brought an action against him, he would willingly take a brief in it." The words had a sensible effect on the coachman, who was well acquainted with the person who spoke them; and the old gentleman above-mentioned, thinking the naked man would afford him frequent opportunities of showing his wit to the lady, offered to join with the company in giving a mug of beer for his fare; till partly alarmed by the threats of the one, and partly by the promises of the other, and being perhaps a little moved with compassion at the poor creature's condition, who stood bleeding and shivering with the cold, he at length agreed; and Joseph was now advancing to the coach, where, seeing the lady, who held the sticks of her fan before her eyes, he absolutely refused, miserable as he was, to enter, unless he was furnished with sufficient covering to prevent giving the least offence to decency. So perfectly modest was this young man; such mighty effects had the spotless example of the amiable Pamela, and the excellent sermons of Mr. Adams, wrought upon him.

Though there were several great-coats about the coach, it was not easy to get over this difficulty which Joseph had started. The two gentlemen complained they were cold, and could not spare a rag; the man of wit saying, with a laugh, that charity began at home; and the coachman who had two great-coats spread under him, refused to lend either, lest they should be made bloody; the

lady's footman desired to be excused for the same reason, which the lady herself, notwithstanding her abhorrence of a naked man, approved: and it is more than probable, poor Joseph, who obstinately adhered to his modest resolution, must have perished, unless the postilion (a lad who hath been since transported for robbing a hen-roost) had voluntarily stript off a great-coat, his only garment, at the same time swearing a great oath (for which he was rebuked by the passengers), "that he would rather ride in his shirt all his life, than suffer a fellow-creature to lie in so miserable a condition."

The reader will observe the touch of parody in the reference to Pamela: and also will note how subsidiary it is to the irony of the whole passage and its unspoken comment on human nature. As for the excellent Mr. Adams, parson of Joseph's parish, he is no less a principal in the story than Joseph himself, and he makes his first entry at the inn where the much-battered Joseph is deposited by these law-fearing Samaritans. Mr. Andrews is on his way to London to raise money by the sale of some sermons; and it is with full confidence in this untouched gold mine that he undertakes to pay for Joseph's accommodation at the inn till recovery. Unhappily, however, a bookseller, who happens to be of the company, dashes his expectations gravely; and the further circumstance that the sermons which he believed to be in his valise had been removed by Mrs. Adams to make room for extra shirts, determines him to accompany Joseph homewards. But since the pair have only a shilling between them, and since before they have gone far they encounter on the road a distressed damsel, no other than Joseph's lovely Fanny — whom Parson Adams, after a vigorous bout of fisticuffs, rescues from a would-be ravisher — the journey is full of troublesome passages. It is, in short, a romance of the high road, in the days when high roads were rife with adventure; and Fielding in his preface,

an admirable and characteristic piece of half-serious criticism, claimed for it no less a title than a comic epic; into which naturally enter, with ingredients of the burlesque character, — battles with fists instead of spear and sword, — and a constant purpose of satire.

The intention of parody, on *Pamela*, disappeared as Fielding grew interested in his tale and his characters. Joseph, for all his excessive insistence upon modesty, is a very fine courageous young fellow and as humanly in love with his Fanny as even Fielding could desire. Of Parson Adams it is only necessary to say that he rivals Goldsmith's Vicar, though he trusts on occasion, as the gentler divine did not, to the arm of the flesh, and has a noble capacity for ale and tobacco. But this mixture of simplicity with real learning, of ignorance of the world with a noble wisdom of the heart, was doubtless in Goldsmith's mind when he even bettered his instruction.

Among the subaltern characters, Mrs. Slipslop, Lady Booby's maid, is deservedly famous, but one and all have a full dose of life, though often the life is of the least reputable kind. Throughout his work Fielding has a weakness for scenes in which low company predominates; he revels in tavern brawls. And it must be allowed that to our more squeamish age he seems often exceedingly coarse.

Tom Jones, by general consent his masterpiece, which followed in 1749, marks the head of his offending in this respect, and it lies open to the censure passed upon it by Colonel Newcome in Thackeray's novel. But Thackeray was the last to blame Fielding, whose work he imitated and praised without stint; and Amelia, the heroine of Fielding's last novel (which bears her name), was his favourite character in all fiction. One discerns in it, perhaps,

too plainly the experiences of a London magistrate — Fielding had been appointed a stipendiary — and an undue preoccupation with processes for debt; but Amelia deserves all the good that can be said of her.

It was Fielding's practice to vary his principal theme by the introduction of incidental stories — characters encountered in the action relating the story of their own lives — and also, more commendably, by chapters in which the author leaves his puppets in the box and discourses at large upon questions of literature or life: the story-teller in him is always coupled with the essayist. In example may be cited the passage where we find it explained why "that high woman," Mrs. Slipslop, refused to return Fanny's curtsey:

> Be it known then, that the human species are divided into two sorts of people, to wit, high people and low people. As by high people I would not be understood to mean persons literally born higher in their dimensions than the rest of the species, nor metaphorically those of exalted characters or abilities; so by low people I cannot be construed to intend the reverse. High people signify no other than people of fashion, and low people those of no fashion. Now this word fashion has by long use lost its original meaning, from which at present it gives us a very different idea; for I am deceived, if by persons of fashion, we do not generally include a conception of birth and accomplishments superior to the herd of mankind; whereas, in reality, nothing more was originally meant by a person of fashion, than a person who drest himself in the fashion of the times; and the word really and truly signifies no more at this day. Now the world being thus divided into people of fashion, and people of no fashion, a fierce contention arose between them; nor would those of one party, to avoid suspicion, be seen publicly to speak to those of the other, though they often held a very good correspondence in private. In this contention it is difficult to say which party succeeded; for, whilst the people of fashion seized several places to their own use, such as courts, assemblies, operas, balls, etc., the people of no fashion, besides one royal place, called his Majesty's Bear-garden, have been in constant

possession of all hops, fairs, revels, etc. Two places have been agreed to be divided between them, namely, the church and the playhouse; where they segregate themselves from each other in a remarkable manner; for, as the people of fashion exalt themselves at church over the heads of the people of no fashion, so in the playhouse they abase themselves in the same degree under their feet. This distinction I have never met with any one able to account for; it is sufficient that, so far from looking on each other as brethren in the Christian language, they seem scarce to regard each other as of the same species. This, the terms "strange persons," "people one does not know," "the creature," "wretches," "beasts," "brutes," and many other appellations evidently demonstrate; which Mrs. Slipslop, having often heard her mistress use, thought she had also a right to use in her turn; and perhaps she was not mistaken; for these two parties, especially those bordering nearly on each other, to wit, the lowest of the high, and the highest of the low, often change their parties according to place and time; for those who are people of fashion in one place, are often people of no fashion in another. And with regard to time, it may not be unpleasant to survey the picture of dependence like a kind of ladder; as, for instance, early in the morning arises the postilion, or some other boy, which great families, no more than great ships, are without, and falls to brushing the clothes and cleaning the shoes of John the footman; who, being drest himself, applies his hands to the same labours for Mr. Second-hand, the squire's gentleman; the gentleman in the like manner, a little later in the day attends the squire; the squire is no sooner equipped, than he attends the levee of my lord; which is no sooner over, than my lord himself is seen at the levee of the favourite, who, after the hour of homage is at an end, appears himself to pay homage to the levee of his sovereign. Nor is there, perhaps, in this whole ladder of dependence, any one step at a greater distance from the other than the first from the second; so that to a philosopher the question might only seem, whether you would choose to be a great man at six in the morning or at two in the afternoon. And yet there are scarce two of these who do not think the least familiarity with the persons below them a condescension, and, if they were to go one step farther, a degradation.

Fielding's younger rival in the more full-blooded

walks of adventure, of rough and tumble scenes, was Tobias Smollett, whose *Roderick Random* and *Peregrine Pickle* overflow with animal spirits, but whose best book is *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*, which describes a coach journey through England, undertaken by an elderly valetudinarian. But while Smollett had the field to himself (Fielding being dead, and Richardson silent), there appeared a new author, who at once took and held his place beside the greater men.

We have already noted the curious fate which made Richardson famous with a great work published at the age of fifty-two. Not less remarkable is the case of Laurence Sterne, who at fifty-five was an obscure country parson and at fifty-six a meteor in the literary world of London. The thing is not fortuitous, for the novel more than any literary form tends to late flowering. Fielding, Goldsmith, Scott, and Thackeray, were all entering middle life before they achieved their triumphs in this form of art, which, more than any other, rests upon a foundation of observation and experience. Dickens, with his precocious knowledge of men and things, gained from the early need to shift for himself, Miss Austen and the Brontës, with their deliberate limitation of range to a tiny and familiar section of human life, are exceptions which (in the true sense of the saying) prove the rule. The form of the novel, vague and capacious as a sack, admits of almost anything that can be put into it; but it must be filled. "An empty sack cannot stand, nor a dead cat walk," is an Irish proverb, and it applies here if anywhere. Fulness and living value are essential; and Sterne's sack, though bulging and misshapen with its freight of strangely assorted contents, is indisputably full, and full of life.

If Sterne had the handling of this metaphor he would not drop it so lightly. He would twist and turn it, displaying from a hundred queer aspects its relevancy and its irrelevancy ; and at the end he would undoubtedly come to an affected stop in his perennial attitude — with head ostentatiously averted, and the outstretched finger pointing to an indecent allusion. That is the central defect in Sterne, and it cannot be too strongly insisted on. Occasional grossness, such as we find in Shakespeare or in Fielding (though in Fielding it must be allowed that the occasions are frequent), is not essential to the work ; but with Sterne the prurience pervades everything ; it is the salt in his soup.

However, it has to be said that Sterne offends against taste and not against morals. No one can possibly be the worse of reading him, and unquestionably he ought to be read, if only to realise with how small materials in one kind a famous novel can be constructed. Plot, properly speaking, there is none in *Tristram Shandy*. You learn from the narrative how Tristram was born and christened, but the circumstantiality of this account is entirely indescribable ; you learn also how the Widow Wadman captivated and secured his Uncle Toby. That is practically all your positive information on the *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* ; and the first two books of the *Life and Opinions*, whose appearance in 1760 made the author illustrious, did not get so far as to usher Tristram into the world. But, on the other hand, if we do not get much direct and business-like narrative, we have brought vividly before us, in their minds and persons, Susannah, the maid ; Dr. Slop, the man mid-wife ; my Uncle Toby, Mr. Shandy's brother ; Corporal Trim, his attached servant ; Mrs. Shandy, that good, homely, milk-

pudding of a woman; Mr. Shandy himself, the eccentric philosopher, whose vagaries of speculation and reading, detailed at the utmost length, make up most of the book; and lastly, besides a number of incidental characters, Yorick, the whimsical curate, who acts as a kind of Greek chorus, and almost undisguisedly presents the author in person. Yet, even with all the field for extravagance which is opened by a full determination to exhaust the eccentricities of character, — by letting "my Uncle Toby" ride to the very death his single hobby of military experiment (conducted by fortifications in the back garden, which represent the fortress of Namur, at whose siege the poor gentleman got the wound which invalided him), and by sending Mr. Shandy careering through all the regions of physical and metaphysical inquiry, in his endeavour to give the important infant a fair and full chance in life — even so Sterne cannot be content without addressing the reader every other chapter in his own person, not as Yorick but as the author; taking him into his confidence, explaining his method or absence of method, deprecating, apologising. Rabelais, Cervantes, and Swift had set great examples in the art of digression; but for sheer vagrancy Sterne outstrips them all.

Perhaps the best known thing in the book is the episode of Le Fevre, when Sterne for once gives to his digression the nature, not of an anecdote or a disquisition, but of a short story, set into the text: and it may rank among the best short stories in the world. But it differs from such a masterpiece as "Wandering Willie's Tale" in *Red Gauntlet*, in that it has value not only for itself, but as illustrating the two best beloved personages in the book — Corporal Trim and my Uncle Toby. More vitally

connected with the plot, however, is the following passage, which needs a little introduction.

Mr. Shandy had a portentous sense of the non-apparent relations between things; as for example of a name upon a man's career. In the course of speculations, which occupy many pages, he had reached a determination to baptise the boy Trismegistus — a name which could not fail to lead him to greatness. Unluckily, he was in bed and undressed when the maid Susannah ran to say that the new-born child was dying, and that Mr. Yorick, who was in attendance, could not risk waiting while Mr. Shandy put on his clothes. Susan was accordingly entrusted with the name, and ran, confident in her memory. What happened must be read in the book; the following chapters tell how the truth was broken to Mr. Shandy, and how Uncle Toby and his retainer commented on the misfortune.

If my wife will but venture him brother Toby, Trismegistus shall be dressed and brought down to us, whilst you and I are getting our breakfast together.

Go, tell Susannah, Obadiah, to step here.

She is run up stairs, answered Obadiah, this very instant, sobbing and crying and wringing her hands as if her heart would break.

We shall have a rare month of it, said my father, turning his head from Obadiah, and looking wistfully in my uncle Toby's face, for some time, — we shall have a devilish month of it, brother Toby, said my father, setting his arms a-kimbo, and shaking his head: fire, water, women, wind, brother Toby! . . . 'Tis some misfortune, quoth my uncle Toby. . . . That it is, cried my father, to have so many jarring elements breaking loose, and riding triumph in every corner of a gentleman's house. — Little boots it to the peace of a family, brother Toby, that you and I possess ourselves, and sit here silent and unmoved, — whilst such a storm is whistling over our heads.

And what's the matter, Susannah? . . . They have called the child Tristram; — and my mistress is just got out of an

hysteric fit about it. — No! — 'tis not my fault said Susannah, — I told him it was Tristram-gistus.

— Make tea for yourself, brother Toby, said my father, taking down his hat: — but how different from the sallies and agitations of voice and members which a common reader would imagine.

— For he spake in the sweetest modulation, — and took down his hat with the genteelest movement of limbs that ever affliction harmonised and attuned together.

— Go to the bowling-green for Corporal Trim, said my uncle Toby, speaking to Obadiah, as soon as my father left the room.

* * * * *

Your honour, said Trim, shutting the parlour door before he began to speak, has heard, I imagine, of this unlucky accident. . . . O, yes, Trim, said my uncle Toby, and it gives me great concern. . . . I am heartily concerned too; but I hope your Honour, replied Trim, will do me the justice to believe that it was not in the least owing to me. . . . To thee, Trim? cried my uncle Toby, looking kindly in his face, — 'twas Susannah's and the Curate's folly betwixt them. . . . What business could they have together, an' please your Honour, in the garden? . . . In the gallery, thou meanest, replied my uncle Toby.

Trim found he was upon a wrong scent, and stopped short with a low bow. — Two misfortunes, quoth the Corporal to himself, are twice as many at least as are needful to be talked over at one time — the mischief the cow has done in breaking into the fortifications may be told his Honour hereafter. — Trim's casuistry and address under the cover of his low bow, prevented all suspicion in my uncle Toby; so he went on with what he had to say to Trim as follows:

For my own part, Trim, though I can see little or no difference betwixt my nephew's being called Tristram and Trismegistus; — yet, as the thing sits so near my brother's heart, Trim, I would freely give a hundred pounds rather than it should have happened. . . . A hundred pounds, an' please your Honour! replied Trim, — I would not give a cherry-stone to boot. . . . Nor would I, Trim, upon my own account, quoth my uncle Toby; — but my brother whom there is no arguing with in this case, — maintains that a great deal more depends, Trim, upon a christian name than what ignorant people imagine; — for he says there never was a great or heroic action performed since the world began by one called Tristram. — Nay, he will have it, Trim, that a man can neither

be learned, nor wise, nor brave. . . . 'Tis all fancy, an' please your Honour: — I fought just as well, continued the Corporal, when the regiment called me Trim, as when they called me James Butler. . . . And for my own part, said my uncle Toby, though I should blush to boast of myself, Trim; — yet, had my name been Alexander, I could have done no more at Namur than my duty. . . . Bless your Honour! cried Trim, advancing three steps as he spoke, does a man think of his christian name when he goes upon the attack? . . . Or when he stands in the trench, Trim? cried my uncle Toby, looking firm. . . . Or when he enters a breach? said Trim, pushing in between two chairs. . . . Or forces the lines? cried my uncle, rising up, and pushing his crutch like a pike. . . . Or facing a platoon? cried Trim, presenting his stick like a firelock. . . . Or when he marches up the glacis? cried my uncle Toby, looking warm and setting his foot upon his stool.

These two chapters present in little the whole book — or would present it if one could add Mr. Shandy's lamentation. But this is wholly impossible.

The Sentimental Journey — through France and Italy, published in 1765 — showed very much the same characteristics; the same humour, the same mastery of pathos (however affected), the same whimsical style. But it is unrelieved by the wholesome presence of my Uncle Toby and his retainer, and, prodigiously clever as it is, it tastes sickly. Yet to many readers the acute and sympathetic observation of foreign manners is an agreeable substitute for Mr. Shandy's fantastic erudition; and, on the whole, the book is more easily readable than *Tristram*. It should be noted that the deliberate cultivation of sensibility in both marks the ascendant influence of Rousseau.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CLUB. JOHNSON, GOLDSMITH, BURKE, GIBBON, HUME

FATE has dealt lavishly with Samuel Johnson. In his life of seventy-five years, from 1709 to 1784, he was, at least in a formal sense, the contemporary of Swift and Pope, who died when Johnson was nearer forty than thirty, and of Burns, who was born when Johnson was fifty and who published his first volume the year after Johnson's death. But his true contemporaries were the men of the period which lies between that dominated by Swift and Pope and the newer revolutionary epoch of which Burns and Blake were the great forerunners. This group included Gray and Collins; it included Goldsmith, a master in many arts; it included the great novelists, Richardson, Fielding, and Sterne; it included Edmund Burke and Edward Gibbon; all of them, in the most evident sense, men of genius. And yet Johnson, whose literary work reveals him merely as a man of great talent, dominates the intellectual life of that period to our apprehension, as he dominated it in the eyes of his own day.

The truth is that Johnson was a man of genius, whose genius found its full expression in one of

those arts which, like the actor's or the singer's, perish normally with the body of the artist. He had a genius for conversation and social intercourse. And here is the special kindness of fate, that he alone among great talkers has come down to us still talking. Fate attached to him the greatest of all artists in biography, and, to leave nothing wanting, threw in Sir Joshua.

It is unnecessary to do more than recall the outline of a career, so brilliantly sketched in brief by Macaulay, which took the son of a provincial bookseller from Lichfield first to Oxford, then to futile attempts after success as a schoolmaster, and lastly to literary hack work in London. Yet one may note that his first important work, the declamatory satire *London*, was published in the same year (1738) as Pope's *Epilogue* to the *Satires*, and Johnson was ranked as a rival to the elder poet. The comparison might be justified by the following passage from *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, his adaptation to contemporary topics of Juvenal's Tenth Satire. The picture is autobiographic; Johnson's own struggles, not yet completed when he wrote, are the theme:

> When first the college rolls receive his name,
> The young enthusiast quits his ease for fame;
> Resistless burns the fever of renown,
> Caught from the strong contagion of the gown.
> O'er Bodley's dome his future labours spread,
> And Bacon's mansion trembles o'er his head.
> Are these thy views? Proceed, illustrious youth,
> And Virtue guard thee to the throne of Truth!
> Yet, should thy soul indulge the generous heat
> Till captive Science yields her last retreat;
> Should Reason guide thee with her brightest ray,
> And pour on misty Doubt resistless day;
> Should no false kindness lure to loose delight,
> Nor praise relax, nor difficulty fright;
> Should tempting Novelty thy cell refrain,
> And Sloth effuse her opiate fumes in vain;

Should Beauty blunt on fops her fatal dart,
Nor claim the triumph of a letter'd heart;
Should no disease thy torpid veins invade,
Nor Melancholy's phantoms haunt thy shade;
Yet hope not life from grief or danger free,
Nor think the doom of man revers'd for thee:
Deign on the passing world to turn thine eyes,
And pause awhile from letters, to be wise;
There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,
Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail.
See nations, slowly wise, and meanly just,
To buried merit raise the tardy bust.
If dreams yet flatter, once again attend,
Hear Lydiat's life and Galileo's end.

It will be observed that Johnson, like so many other prose writers, made his *début* as a poet. The capital which he brought with him to London was the incomplete MS. of his blank verse tragedy *Irene*, which David Garrick (a pupil of Johnson's school, who accompanied his master's quest for fortune) was afterwards destined to produce on the stage — but without success. Literature, however, has little concern with Johnson as a poet. And though, beyond question, he enriched the literature by his contributions to it, his true service was rather to the language.

The great work of his life was the *Dictionary*, and it is notable that a man should have earned not merely credit but popular repute by such an undertaking. Yet it was natural that an age which had begun to judge literature by hard and fast rules, and had recognised canons of taste in style, should desiderate also a standard of the tongue. Men wanted to know, first, the precise meaning of words; next, their historical origin; then the authorities for their use. And before Johnson's work no book existed to refer to. He, with his enormous classical reading, his wide knowledge of books in English, was the fittest

man then living to undertake the task; and his strong personality stamped itself on the arid matter and gave it life. The *Dictionary* was not merely useful but readable, even apart from the occasional bursts of caprice which Johnson allowed himself, as when he defined patriotism to be "the last refuge of a scoundrel."

Nor was this all. He had written enormously, and written in a style which was his own, as Swift's was, but which differed from Swift's in being imitable. Hitherto the accredited men of letters had been able to catch in their prose the tone of cultivated society in their day. Johnson's style was formed in seclusion, when books were his companions; it was academic rather than urbane, an artificial rather than a natural method of expression. The balance of the clauses in his tripartite sentences was more obvious than in Addison's subtler harmonies; the sonority gained by the habitual employment of words derived from Latin could be attained by any one resorting to the same means; and in an age when the habit of writing and of reading was spreading rapidly, Johnson's example was eagerly caught at. It is the misfortune of all men who possess a strongly-marked style to see its features overcharged in imitation, and for a while the imitators applied themselves to Johnson's earlier rather than his later works. There is a notable difference; for the course of his life in London, where he found himself gradually the centre of a Club which has never been rivalled for brilliancy, produced its natural effect on his writing. It is probable that he began to talk less like a pedant; it is certain that he wrote less like one; and by far the best of his books is the latest, his *Lives of the British Poets*. A single example from the sketch of Collins will

illustrate not only Johnson's standpoint in criticism, but also the contrast between his earlier and later manner :

He now (about 1744) came to London a literary adventurer, with many projects in his head, and very little money in his pocket. He designed many works; but his great fault was irresolution; or the frequent calls of immediate necessity broke his scheme, and suffered him to pursue no settled purpose. A man doubtful of his dinner, or trembling at a creditor, is not much disposed to abstracted meditation, or remote inquiries. He published proposals for a History of the Revival of Learning; and I have heard him speak with great kindness of Leo the Tenth, and with keen resentment of his tasteless successor. But probably not a page of his history was ever written. He planned several tragedies, but he only planned them. He wrote now-and-then odes and other poems, and did something, however little. About this time I fell into his company. His appearance was decent and manly; his knowledge considerable, his views extensive, his conversation elegant, and his disposition cheerful. By degrees I gained his confidence; and one day was admitted to him when he was immured by a bailiff, that was prowling in the street. On this occasion recourse was had to the booksellers, who, on the credit of a translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which he engaged to write with a large commentary, advanced as much money as enabled him to escape into the country. He showed me the guineas safe in his hand. Soon afterwards his uncle, Mr. Martin, a lieutenant-colonel, left him about two thousand pounds; a sum which Collins could scarcely think exhaustible, and which he did not live to exhaust. The guineas were then repaid, and the translation neglected. But man is not born for happiness. Collins, who, while he studied to live, felt no evil but poverty, no sooner lived to study, than his life was assailed by more dreadful calamities, disease and insanity.

Having formerly written his character, while perhaps it was yet more distinctly impressed upon my memory, I shall insert it here:

"Mr. Collins was a man of extensive literature, and of vigorous faculties. He was acquainted not only with the learned tongues, but with the Italian, French, and Spanish languages. He had employed his mind chiefly on works of fiction, and subjects of fancy; and, by indulging some peculiar habits of thought, was eminently delighted with

those flights of imagination which pass the bounds of nature, and to which the mind is reconciled only by a passive acquiescence in popular traditions. He loved fairies, genii, giants, and monsters; he delighted to rove through the meanders of enchantment, to gaze on the magnificence of golden palaces, to repose by the waterfalls of Elysian gardens. This was, however, the character rather of his inclination than of his genius; the grandeur of wildness, and the novelty of extravagance, were always desired by him, but not always attained. Yet, as diligence is never wholly lost, if his efforts sometimes caused harshness and obscurity, they likewise produced in happier moments sublimity and splendour. This idea which he had formed of excellence led him to Oriental fictions and allegorical imagery, and perhaps, while he was intent upon description, he did not sufficiently cultivate sentiment. His poems are the productions of a mind not deficient in fire, nor unfurnished with knowledge either of books or of life, but somewhat obstructed in its progress by deviation in quest of mistaken beauties."

One finds there the essential bookishness and also the close touch with life's rough and tumble which in their union make Johnson so unique. The very limitation, too, of the critical outlook adds a certain charm. Johnson is always positive, and often (as in his estimate of Milton's *Lycidas*) notoriously wrong. But his judgments are sincere, and even when they do not illuminate the subject they are written on, they reveal the man who writes them.

That is always what one comes back to with Johnson. He set a standard of English style, which, superficially rather than essentially modified by Macaulay, prevails still for what may be called academic purposes, as the ideal vehicle for that kind of writing which is designed to convey the arguments rather than the temperament of the writer. It was no small thing to do. But the essential reason why Johnson is more to all of us than almost any man of letters is because of that magical personality, which made him, — uncouth, scrofulous, hypochondriacal, surly, and overbearing though he

was, — still a focus of attraction to all that was best in his day. To know Johnson it is doubtless necessary to read him. *The Lives of the Poets* is one of the most entertaining and best written books in the language; his account of *The Journey to the Hebrides*, on which Boswell dragged him, is excellent reading, apart from the droll natural incongruity of the writer and his subject. But above all, to know Johnson, it is Boswell that one must read. Two extracts may be given, the first of which is one of those which enable Macaulay, for rhetorical purposes, to represent Boswell as a fool; the second shows to any careful student the mastery of phrase, the keen selective observation, which, by a hundred such passages, has given us a presentment of the man, more living than even Reynolds could accomplish. But neither can show what is only revealed by the whole book — that genuine enthusiasm, which lifted Boswell to the height of perceiving that he could make his hero so admirable, so lovable, and so heroic, that he need not fear to render him ridiculous by showing his defects, whether of body or of mind.

The first narrates Boswell's first meeting with Johnson, and it is prefaced by an account of the long desire to achieve this acquaintance which led him to associate much with Davies the bookseller, who knew, and could tell of, the great man.

At last, on Monday the 16th of May, when I was sitting in Mr. Davies's back parlour, after having drunk tea with him and Mrs. Davies, Johnson unexpectedly came into the shop; and Mr. Davies having perceived him through the glass-door in the room in which we were sitting, advancing towards us, — he announced his awful approach to me, somewhat in the manner of an actor in the part of Horatio, when he addresses Hamlet on the appearance of his father's ghost, "Look, my lord, it comes." I found that I had a very perfect idea of Johnson's figure from the portrait of

him painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, soon after he had published his Dictionary, in the attitude of sitting in his easy chair in deep meditation; which was the first picture his friend did for him, which Sir Joshua very kindly presented to me (and from which an engraving has been made for this work). Mr. Davies mentioned my name, and respectfully introduced me to him. I was much agitated; and recollecting his prejudice against the Scotch, of which I had heard much, I said to Davies, "Don't tell where I come from."—"From Scotland," cried Davies, roguishly. "Mr. Johnson," said I, "I do indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it." I am willing to flatter myself that I meant this as light pleasantry to soothe and conciliate him, and not as a humiliating abasement at the expense of my country. But however that might be, this speech was somewhat unlucky; for with that quickness of wit for which he was so remarkable, he seized the expression "come from Scotland," which I used in the sense of being of that country; and, as if I had said that I had come away from it, or left it, retorted, "That, sir, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help." This stroke stunned me a good deal; and when we had sat down, I felt myself not a little embarrassed, and apprehensive of what might come next. He then addressed himself to Davies: "What do you think of Garrick? He has refused me an order for the play for Miss Williams, because he knows the house will be full, and that an order would be worth three shillings." Eager to take any opening to get into conversation with him, I ventured to say, "O sir, I cannot think Mr. Garrick would grudge such a trifle to you." "Sir," said he, with a stern look, "I have known David Garrick longer than you have done: and I know no right you have to talk to me on the subject." Perhaps I deserved this check; for it was rather presumptuous in me, an entire stranger, to express any doubt of the justice of his animadversion upon his old acquaintance and pupil. I now felt myself much mortified, and began to think that the hope which I had long indulged of obtaining his acquaintance was blasted. And, in truth, had not my ardour been uncommonly strong, and my resolution uncommonly persevering, so rough a reception might have deterred me for ever from making any further attempts. Fortunately, however, I remained upon the field not wholly discomfited; and was soon rewarded by hearing some of his conversation.

The second is an excerpt from Boswell's sketch

of Johnson's personal peculiarities of tricks and habits:

> That the most minute singularities which belonged to him, and made very observable parts of his appearance and manner, may not be omitted, it is requisite to mention, that while talking or even musing as he sat in his chair, he commonly held his head to one side towards his right shoulder, and shook it in a tremulous manner, moving his body backwards and forwards, and rubbing his left knee in the same direction, with the palm of his hand. In the intervals of articulating he made various sounds with his mouth, sometimes as if ruminating, or what is called chewing the cud, sometimes giving half a whistle, sometimes making his tongue play backwards from the roof of his mouth, as if clucking like a hen, and sometimes protruding it against his upper gums in front, as if pronouncing quickly under his breath, *too, too, too*: all this accompanied sometimes with a thoughtful look, but more frequently with a smile. Generally when he had concluded a period, in the course of a dispute, by which time he was a good deal exhausted by violence and vociferation, he used to blow out his breath like a whale. This I suppose was a relief to his lungs; and seemed in him to be a contemptuous mode of expression, as if he had made the arguments of his opponent fly like chaff before the wind.

It happens unluckily that Boswell, so excellent a portrayer of what he understood, was very ill-fitted by nature to understand the figure in that famous group which stands next to Johnson's. Boswell was accustomed to be browbeaten, and to see others browbeaten, by his hero; Oliver Goldsmith browbeat nobody. Boswell's hero owned a mine of solid learning, full of heavy missiles to be hurled in argument; Goldsmith was rich only in delicate invention, whose products could no more be improvised than a flower can spring of a sudden. Consequently Boswell, whose faculty of intelligent admiration was extremely limited, misrepresented Goldsmith, very often by the simple process of writing down literally the words which Gold-

smith, after his Irish fashion, meant to be taken in another sense. Fortunately, the remedy is easy. No one who reads *The Vicar of Wakefield* will misunderstand its author.

Oliver Goldsmith was the son of a poor parson in County Longford; went to Trinity College, Dublin, as a sizar, and failed to graduate. Renouncing the church, he decided for medicine, and crossed to Edinburgh for its study. Here also he failed to attain a degree, and was, for the first of many times, arrested for debt. Discharged by the intervention of friends, he set out penniless for the continent, and in the course of two years wandered on foot through the Low Countries, France, Italy, the Tyrol, and Switzerland; depending chiefly on the music of his flute to earn him a bed and a meal. From Switzerland he sent home to his brother, now a parson as poor as the father, the first draft of *The Traveller*. Returning to London penniless in 1756, he first tried to earn a living by his scanty medical qualifications; then found employment as a press-corrector at Samuel Richardson's printing house; then turned usher at a school, concerning which trade one of his characters observes, "I had rather be an under turnkey in Newgate." At last, in April, 1757, he found occupation as hack writer to a bookseller, in the least profitable days of authorship.

Under Queen Anne, as we have seen, literature had been fashionable, and success was rewarded (inappropriately enough) with political promotion. When the State ceased to reward, the private munificence of patrons was courted by dedications. That resource also had failed, and as yet the book-buying public was small, the laws of copyright imperfect, and professional authorship a wild

venture. The jail was more assured than the patron, and the habitual indigence of writers had attached a stigma to the profession. To obtain a place or pension by your writings was counted honourable, to be paid by a bookseller was low. Swift, who inclined to avarice, would never touch a penny from this source ; a hundred years later, Byron began with the same prejudice, though he died in a very different opinion. But when Goldsmith commenced author, Grub Street was at its lowest depth of disrepute. He drank deep of the bitter cup of poverty, which renders men ridiculous, and no man was less fitted for the ordeal. He had none of the thrifty self-preserving virtues ; his person was small and grotesque ; he had foibles that would have made him laughable if born in the purple. Contempt was his daily portion, and even fame hardly relieved him of it ; and yet he shows us in his writings the sweetest and most unspoilt temper to be found perhaps in all literature.

For five years, from 1757 onward, he worked under the lash, only becoming gradually aware that in letters he had a true vocation. Slowly, almost unconsciously, he was lifted by his talents ; and somewhere in the welter of difficulties, he encountered Johnson, hardly less embarrassed, but already familiar with the ablest men in London. In 1763 was founded, by Reynolds, the Literary Club, and with Johnson and Burke, Goldsmith was admitted among the nine original members—a sufficient indication that his work in *The Citizen of the World*, *The Bee*, and other periodic publications had gained him note among the judicious. But a reputation of this kind implies no financial success, and in 1763 he was arrested for debt at his landlady's suit, and sent for Johnson. Johnson

drew from him what he had yet confided to no one — a novel written in the spare moments snatched from hack work, a piece of work done for the sake of doing it. It was *The Vicar of Wakefield.* A bookseller, on Johnson's recommendation, gave sixty pounds for the manuscript, but, doubting of its success, pigeon-holed and put it by. In the next year, however, Goldsmith, hitherto anonymous, published in his own name *The Traveller.* The sketch of this poem had been made ten years before, but till growing certainty of his powers and the good opinion of his associates gave him confidence, he had never touched it again. Now it was completed, and he sprang into unlooked-for fame — Johnson leading the chorus.

A republication of the author's already collected essays followed, and in 1766 appeared the *Vicar*, with no immediate success. Goldsmith was still a drudge, though famous. The turn in his fortunes came by the stage. In January, 1768, was acted *The Good-Natured Man*, which, not without difficulty, won its way upon an audience used to the sentimental comedy of that period. It brought him five hundred pounds—money to spend, and he spent it, not wisely. His lack of prudence condemned him still to hack work, but the drudgery was now reasonably well paid, and little by little he built up the other composition which with *The Traveller* makes up his slender but immortal volume of poetry. To these have to be added some of the best light verse ever written, in his prologues and epilogues, his droll story of the *Haunch of Venison*, and, above all, in his *Retaliation.*

The Deserted Village, which appeared in 1770, and *She Stoops to Conquer*, his second and more famous comedy, played in 1773, put the climax

on Goldsmith's fame. From pecuniary difficulties he never emerged, and he died in 1774 at the age of forty-six. He was then still busy upon a unique composition, his *Retaliation* upon Garrick's extempore couplet, spoken at the Club:

> "Here lies Nolly Goldsmith, for shortness called Noll,
> Who wrote like an angel and talked like poor Poll."

Goldsmith's rejoinder, a perfect example of friendly satire, did not limit itself to the description of Garrick, though Garrick's is the most elaborate portrait. Burke, Cumberland the dramatist, with half a dozen of less note are sketched for us; but, unhappily, not Boswell nor Johnson. The character of Reynolds comes to us unfinished: it was the last thing Goldsmith worked on.

> Here Reynolds is laid, and, to tell you my mind,
> He has not left a wiser or better behind;
> His pencil was striking, resistless, and grand;
> His manners were gentle, complying, and bland;
> Still born to improve us in every part,
> His pencil our faces, his manners our heart:
> To coxcombs averse, yet most civilly steering,
> When they judged without skill, he was still hard of hearing:
> When they talked of their Raphaels, Correggios, and stuff,
> He shifted his trumpet, and only took snuff.
> By flattery unspoiled . . .

Criticism may fairly omit Goldsmith's excursions into history and natural history. His essays deserve to be more familiar than they are: Beau Tibbs is worthy of Steele or Addison. But Goldsmith, unlike the writers of the *Spectator*, did not stop at detached studies; he attempted the finished form, which combined characters into groups and makes incident lead up to incident. And, though few novels can have a plot less probable than that

of the *Vicar*, we scarcely stop to consider the fact, so complete is the human consistency throughout. It has been more translated than any book in English, and one may be exempted from describing it. The student should note, however, that its charm lies in a mixture of simplicity and subtlety; Goldsmith deals freely in fun — take for instance the adventure of Moses and the gross of green spectacles — but it is always wise fun. The laugh leaves thought behind it. There is no book which combines so minute an observation of human nature with a perfect charity. Its humour is saintly as its pathos; and we have here the Christian character presented in its meekness, its simplicity, its long-suffering, and its cheerfulness, as no other man has ever presented it. Who but Goldsmith could retain sympathy for the central figure, a man always willing to turn the other cheek? A single quotation must be given from the description of the Vicar's family:

As we lived near the road, we often had the traveller or stranger visit us to taste our gooseberry wine, for which we had great reputation; and I profess, with the veracity of an historian, that I never knew one of them find fault with it. Our cousins too, even to the fortieth remove, all remembered their affinity, without any help from the herald's office, and came very frequently to see us. Some of them did us no great honour by these claims of kindred; as we had the blind, the maimed, and the halt amongst the number. However, my wife always insisted, that, as they were the same flesh and blood, they should sit with us at the same table. So that, if we had not very rich, we generally had very happy friends about us; for this remark will hold good through life, that the poorer the guest, the better pleased he ever is with being treated; and as some men gaze with admiration at the colours of a tulip, or the wing of a butterfly, so *I was by nature an admirer of happy human faces.* However, when any one of our relations was found to be a person of a very bad character, a troublesome guest, or one we desired to get rid of, upon his leaving my house, I ever took

care to lend him a riding-coat, or a pair of boots, or sometimes a horse of small value, and I always had the satisfaction of finding he never came back to return them. By this the house was cleared of such as we did not like; but never was the family of Wakefield known to turn the traveller or the poor dependant out of doors.

The poems can hardly be said to rank quite on a level with this masterpiece. Goldsmith's prose style is his own, unmistakable in every sentence. He uses no words but those which, as it seems, every man would use, he takes always the simplest and easiest way of speech; and yet the same accent, the same pervading personality is always felt. His thought, too, in prose, is always personal, always his own, full of gentle surprises. In the poems, he is deliberately didactic, and the generalisations which underlie them are not the outcome of his own experience but of reading, and the manner of his expression is coloured by Pope. Such a line as that which Matthew Arnold selects as typical

> No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale

is conventional in expression, though it expresses what it is not easy to put in so few words. But Pope might have written the line. What Pope could hardly have done is to give the vivid picture to the eye in such a couplet as this:

> No more the smith his swarthy brow shall clear,
> Relax his ponderous strength, and lean to hear.

But above all, what is wholly beyond Pope's range is the gentle humanity of the poems: to render the traveller's homeward longing, or that wonderful lament of the exile who learns that his home has passed away.

> In all my wanderings round this world of care,
> In all my griefs — and God has given my share —
> I still had hopes my latest hours to crown,
> Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down;

> To husband out life's taper at the close,
> And keep the flame from wasting by repose:
> I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,
> Amidst the swains to show my book-learned skill,
> Around my fire an evening group to draw,
> And tell of all I felt, and all I saw;
> And, as a hare, whom hounds and horns pursue,
> Pants to the place from whence at first she flew,
> I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
> Here to return — and die at home at last.

If we apply to this passage Arnold's test and put it, as he bids us, beside such a line as

> In cradle of the rude imperious surge,

or

> And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
> From this world-wearied flesh,

we recognise, it is true, a difference in kind, but not in quality. The difference in kind is due to a difference in aim; Goldsmith sets himself the harder task, to construct poetry with the colours proper to prose, and the method no doubt is mistaken. But with it results can be achieved which bring poetry home to minds that are closed even against Shakespeare. Hardly any poet has so universal an audience.

In poetry Goldsmith is a link between Pope and Cowper. In prose fiction his one work stands unrivalled, unimitated, alone of its kind. It was in the theatre that his influence was most clearly felt, for he brought back laughter to the boards.

Some notion of the sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century may be gathered from the passages between Faulkland and Julia in Sheridan's *The Rivals*. In upon a wilderness of these refined dialoguings burst Tony Lumpkin cracking his whip, with all the rough and tumble of droll adventure about him. Goldsmith was held to be low; but he was natural, and nature triumphed,

all the more assuredly because it was good-nature as well.

Edmund Burke, whose close union with the Club brings him next to be considered, can have no justice done him in a work of this nature. He unites the realms of politics and literature, and falls between two thrones. Goldsmith's phrase is terribly descriptive :

> Though fraught with all learning, yet straining his throat,
> To persuade Tommy Townsend to lend him a vote.

Irish like Goldsmith, poor like Goldsmith and Johnson, he began like them in the lower walks of literature, but politics drew him quicker out of the mire. He became, first, private secretary to a statesman, then member for a pocket borough. But while Johnson and Goldsmith in the end achieved all that lay in their natures, Burke was committed to a career where only office could give him the opportunity, for which they needed nothing but pen, ink, and a publisher. And Burke never held responsible office. In a long parliamentary career he had only the melancholy satisfaction of seeing those misfortunes arise which he had foretold if his advice were neglected. He saw America lost ; he saw Ireland being goaded into rebellion, though he died (in 1797) before the actual outbreak. Worse still, after a life of championing liberty, he saw the zeal for liberty break into the French Revolution, uprooting, as it seemed to him, the venerable fabric of society. By a sad irony, the single one of his writings which evoked the desired response and gave the desired stimulus to action was his pamphlet, *Reflections on the French Revolution*, which plunged England into a mad and unreasoning hostility to France. Burke only prevailed with the multitude when he shared their limited view.

In a sense posterity has repaired some injustices. His oratory, which produced little effect in the House of Commons, seems to us richer in form and substance than that of Cicero or Demosthenes. And though to read and understand him we have often to study the details of some half-forgotten and unimportant political transaction, yet the particular issue is by Burke always related to principles of eternal validity. A single instance may be given from his speech on "The True Policy of Great Britain towards her American Colonies." The student will note how argument grows out of argument:

I am sensible, sir, that all which I have asserted in my detail is admitted in the gross, but that quite a different conclusion is drawn from it. America, gentlemen say, is a noble object. It is an object well worth fighting for. Certainly it is, if fighting a people is the best way of gaining them. Gentlemen in this respect will be led to their choice of means by their complexions and their habits. Those who understand the military art will of course have some predilection for it. Those who wield the thunder of the state may have more confidence in the efficacy of arms. But I confess, possibly for want of this knowledge, my opinion is much more in favour of prudent management than of force; considering force not as an odious, but a feeble instrument, for preserving a people so numerous, so active, so growing, so spirited as this, in a profitable and subordinate connexion with us.

First, sir, permit me to observe, that the use of force alone is but temporary. It may subdue for a moment, but it does not remove the necessity of subduing again, and a nation is not governed, which is perpetually to be conquered.

My next objection is its uncertainty. Terror is not always the effect of force, and an armament is not a victory. If you do not succeed, you are without resource; for, conciliation failing, force remains; but, force failing, no further hope of reconciliation is left. Power and authority are sometimes bought by kindness; but they can never be begged as alms by an impoverished and defeated violence.

A further objection to force is, that you impair the object by your very endeavours to preserve it. The thing you

fought for is not the thing you recover; but depreciated, sunk, wasted, and consumed in the contest. Nothing less will content me, than whole America. I do not choose to consume its strength along with our own; because in all parts it is the British strength that I consume. I do not choose to be caught by a foreign enemy at the end of this exhausting conflict; still less in the midst of it. I may escape; but I can make no assurance against such an event. Let me add, that I do not choose wholly to break the American spirit; because it is the spirit that has made the country.

Lastly, we have no sort of experience in favour of force as an instrument in the rule of our colonies. Their growth and their utility has been owing to methods altogether different. Our ancient indulgence has been said to be pursued to a fault. It may be so. But we know, if feeling is evidence, that our fault was more tolerable than our attempt to mend it; and our sin far more salutary than our penitence.

These, sir, are my reasons for not entertaining that high opinion of untried force, by which many gentlemen, for whose sentiments in other particulars I have great respect, seem to be so greatly captivated. But there is still behind a third consideration concerning this object, which serves to determine my opinion on the sort of policy which ought to be pursued in the management of America, even more than its population and commerce, I mean its temper and character.

In this character of the Americans, a love of freedom is the predominating feature which marks and distinguishes the whole; and as an ardent is always a jealous affection, your colonies become suspicious, restive, and untractable, whenever they see the least attempt to wrest from them by force, or shuffle from them by chicane, what they think the only advantage worth living for. This fierce spirit of liberty is stronger in the English colonies probably than in any other people of the earth; and this from a great variety of powerful causes, which, to understand the true temper of their minds, and the direction which this spirit takes, it will not be amiss to lay open somewhat more largely.

But Burke can no more be represented by an extract than an oak of the forest by a branch one carries in the hand. The same is true of another

member of the Club — a man very different in fortune and disposition.

It may be candidly admitted that while everyone ought to read *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, not everyone can find the time or energy to do so. But every student of literature can and should read Edward Gibbon's *Autobiography*, one of the most curious, readable, and instructive pieces of prose literature.

Its author was the son of a wealthy and well-connected English gentleman. Sickly in boyhood, he had time to develop a passion for reading, and a precocious intelligence, which convinced him by the age of fifteen that Roman Catholicism was the true faith. His father sent him to a Calvinist minister at Lausanne, where the arguments of M. Pavillard, and the fear of a suspended allowance, prevailed upon the convert to revert to Protestantism. He remained in Switzerland till he had acquired a perfect mastery of French (reading all the while omnivorously), and till he was old enough to become engaged to a Swiss young lady. But here again the father put his foot down, and again Gibbon was tractable. "I sighed as a lover, but I obeyed as a son." The lady did not miss celebrity; she became the wife of Neckar, finance minister under Louis XVI., in a famous and evil hour, and the mother of Madame de Stael. Gibbon was recalled, and given a commission in the militia; and though probably no man was ever less fit by temper and body for soldiering, he acquired some useful knowledge. "The Captain of the Hampshire Grenadiers," he writes with characteristic pomp, "has not been useless to the historian of the Roman Empire." Not till the militia had been disbanded, and till he had again left England (this time for

the grand tour), was it settled that the Captain should blossom into the historian. We know the place, the day, and the hour.

It was at Rome on the 15th of October, 1764, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind. But my original plan was circumscribed to the decay of the city rather than of the empire; and though my reading and reflections began to point towards that object, some years elapsed and several avocations intervened before I was seriously engaged in the execution of that laborious work.

We know also with equal precision when the laborious work terminated.

I have presumed to mark the moment of conception: I shall now commemorate the hour of my final deliverance. It was on the day, or rather night, of the 27th of June, 1787, between the hours of eleven and twelve, that I wrote the last lines of the last page, in a summer-house in my garden. After laying down my pen I took several turns in a *berceau*, or covered walk of acacias, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene, the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent. I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on recovery of my freedom, and, perhaps, the establishment of my fame. But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind, by the idea that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that, whatsoever might be the future date of my history, the life of the historian must be short and precarious.

We have here an instance of self-dedication as clear and complete and successful as Milton's; but the contrast is no less remarkable. Gibbon also served his country. He sat in Parliament from 1774 to 1783, a mute member, "safe but inglorious," not caring to risk his reputation by speech, and supporting by his silent vote the most disastrous measures that ever passed the House of Commons

— measures which he habitually condemned in conversation. He was rewarded for his silence and his votes by a lucrative sinecure. When this post was suppressed, he retired to Lausanne, where, among exquisite surroundings, he consolidated his fame by the completion of his great work. The volumes, as they appeared from 1776 onwards, were greeted by the world with a verdict which coincided with the author's. For Gibbon matches Milton in confidence ; but what seems superb assurance in the one is self-complacency in the other. He provided in his will "that my funeral be regulated with the strictest simplicity. Shall I be accused of vanity if I add that a monument is superfluous?" He was quite right, as always ; being perhaps the only great figure in literature whose emotions never disturbed the level operation of his brain.

He writes of his father : "The tears of a son are seldom lasting ; I submitted to the order of Nature, and my grief was soothed by the conscious satisfaction that I had discharged all the duties of filial piety." (That is quite true ; he had ; but his father to the last never trusted him.) "Few, perhaps, are the children who after the expiration of some months or years would sincerely rejoice in the resurrection of their parents ; and it is a melancholy truth that my father's death, not unhappy for himself, was the only event that could save me from a hopeless life of obscurity and indigence." Gibbon's standard of comfort, it must be said, was high ; and with his amazing abilities he never contemplated the possibility of earning his own living.

Still, when all is said, behind the Gibbon of the autobiography there is the Gibbon whom we see in his letters, the lifelong friend of certain favoured persons, notably of Lord Sheffield, and, indeed, also of his stepmother. He was also sincerely attached

to the aunt who brought him up, Mrs. Catherine Porten, "at whose name I feel a tear of gratitude trickling down my cheek." This phrase, with its hackneyed literary fiction, is almost the only one which appears in *all* of the six drafts of the autobiography which have come down to us. There can be no doubt, first, that Gibbon meant what he said, and secondly, that he thought this the most proper way of saying it; the whole man is there if you come to think of it. The book is unsurpassed, unique, indeed, in a quality which it would be difficult to define; nothing could be further from *naïveté*, yet it comes to the same. His analysis of complicated states of mind is so lucid, so frank, and so exact, and he is so perfectly convinced that he need be ashamed of nothing which goes to make up Edward Gibbon, that his narrative is as candid as simplicity transformed into print. He has a wonderful apprehension, too, of common things in their true inwardness, which may be illustrated by two phrases: "that early and invincible love of reading which I would not exchange for the treasures of India"; and the description of his chamber at Lausanne, "which instead of a companionable fire must be warmed by the dull invisible heat of a stove." Admirable writer!

His merits as a historian need not be discussed here. As a writer, he shows everywhere the influence of French, which had so strong a fascination for him that he composed in that language his first published work, and hesitated whether to employ it for his *History*. He learnt enormously from Voltaire, and his irony is that of France rather than of England. There is no period in history in which the Channel made so little of a division as in the third quarter of that century. English ideas were the fashion in France, English

liberty was cited as the model for Europe. Gibbon wrote hardly less for continental than for English scholars : while his contemporary, David Hume, found himself more famous in Paris than in London.

Hume is another of the great writers who lie outside the scope of this book. The literary quality of his work, though it helped to spread the influence of his ideas, is not like that of Gibbon's ; for if Gibbon were untrustworthy and superficial as a historian, we should still read his *Autobiography*, and perhaps also his *History*, for the splendour of its style, the lucidity of its thought, and the dignity of its narrative. Hume as a historian has been superseded though not discredited ; his most important work, the *Treatise of Human Nature*, makes him a landmark in the history of philosophy — not of literature.

All these men stand on the eve of the great change — which they half foresaw and wholly deprecated — that shook Europe and altered in great measure the constitution of society. No such change is without its effects on literature, and we have to consider the beginnings of a new order both in poetry and in prose.

CHAPTER XIV

BURNS

We now have to consider the immense contribution made by Scotland to the literature of the English tongue from the middle of the eighteenth century onward. It is necessary first to understand that: whereas in Ireland and Wales up to that period the only true vernacular was the ancient Celtic tongue (Cymric in Wales, Gaelic in Ireland), there existed in Scotland two unrelated vernacular dialects; one, that of the Highlands, a Gaelic hardly distinguishable from the Irish, and called, indeed, the Erse; the other, that of the Lowlands, a dialect of English, which had early become stereotyped by literature. In the century which followed the death of Chaucer, King James I. of Scotland, educated in captivity at Windsor, wrote verses in that speech of the Thames Valley which Chaucer had set to Romance rhythms; but he wrote also poems in the very different English that was spoken at his own court. Up till the reign of Elizabeth, Scotland produced far more poetry of importance than did the southern kingdom. William Dunbar is a writer who has some claim to be named with Villon. Under the James who first joined the thrones we

find literature at the Scotch court no longer vernacular; Drummond of Hawthornden rivals Spenser in his odes and sonnets. But among the country places the dialect literature survived, in ballad, song, and satire, written by peasant and noble, by farmers and schoolmasters, by earls' daughters and village ale-wives, till at last it flowered into the greatest peasant poet that the world has ever seen. There existed a Lowland Scots literature without break or cessation for at least four hundred years before Burns wrote. His literary ancestry was as old as that of Gray or Collins, but it was distinct and separate from theirs — in so far, at least, as he was a poet of the vernacular.

Side by side with this there existed in Scotland a great body of Gaelic literature, much of it comparatively recent, and closely analogous to the other vernacular. There were Jacobite songs in Gaelic as in Lowland Scots (or Lallan); there were love songs and drinking songs; and it is here that the Gaelic influence is most perceptible in the work of Burns and his forerunners. Music, which is of no tongue, was held in common by speakers of Gaelic and speakers of "Lallan," and the most famous Scottish songs are written to Gaelic airs. At the very time when Pope and his school had pinned English down to hard unelastic rhythms, Burns was writing verse which had the free music of wind and running water, as others had written it before him. *The Flowers o' the Forest*, written by a sister of Lord Minto's, has exactly the rhythm of a Gaelic song printed in Dr. Hyde's *Love Songs of Connaught*: it has also the Gaelic and not the English system of rhyme. But the most characteristic features of what may be called the classical literature of the Gaels have no reflection in Lowland Scots. The poetry produced in Ireland and Scotland, perhaps

seven or eight centuries ago, perhaps seventeen or eighteen, came into the knowledge of Europe through the medium of eighteenth-century English.

Macpherson's adaptations from the Ossianic poems began to appear in 1760. They went through a score of editions in fifty years, being continually republished, and translated into many languages. His paraphrase, in itself of no great merit, and made from late and adulterated versions of the epic compositions, does not belong to the history of English literature, except in so far as its success proves the growing hunger for a poetry that should get back to primitive nature, and away wholly from the region of *vers de société* ; and also in so far as it paved the way for Scott by stimulating curiosity about the Highland life and traditions.

By far more important, however, as a forerunner of Scott is Bishop Percy, who in 1765 published his *Reliques of Ballad Poetry*. The northern vernacular (for Lallan was spoken on both sides of the border) possessed an amazing wealth of stories set to rough but effective verse, commemorating duels and combats, raids and ridings, the lifting of brides and of cattle. There will be more to say of this in connection with Scott ; but it must be remembered that Burns as well as Scott was nourished on these ballads, knew them by heart, collected them and emended them. And also it must be observed that twenty years before Burns published his own verses the attention of literary men had been attracted to the literary riches of the dialect in which he was to write. They were prepared to judge him by the standard of the literature to which he belonged, a literature untouched by the conventions of a drawing room.

His contemporary, William Blake, writing in English, was less fortunate. But it must be under-

stood that Blake was a reactionary, while in Burns we have simply the culmination of a school.

Burns is sometimes spoken of as an untaught artist. Nothing could be less true. No poet is more derivative, more inclined to follow and surpass accepted models. Moreover, by no means all poets have been better educated. His father was indeed a peasant, living by what he could make out of a few acres of rented land, and living in a cabin. But he was a Scotch peasant, and had the regard of his race for education. His sons got schooling from the time they were six, a good grounding in English. He himself was intelligent, his wife had a fund of song and story, and Burns grew up, as many a peasant does in Scotland and Ireland, in an atmosphere where literature was far better understood and valued than in most middle-class English homes. But poverty set him too early to the mill. His father took a larger farm, as his sons were growing up, and tried to work it with their help. At fourteen the boy was doing a ploughman's work. Yet he read indefatigably, and with help from a friendly schoolmaster, who came over on half-holidays out of love for his quick pupil and the pupil's father, he learnt to spell out French. He grew up to manhood, a drudge in body, working on his father's farm in a hopeless struggle against failure, which finally closed in on the family in 1784, when the father died. William Burns had not succeeded in keeping his head above water, but he had set high in his household the value for things of the mind. The sons took up the business with full determination to succeed, and from 1784 Robert Burns with his brother Gilbert were tenants of Mossgiel Farm. Here within the next two years most of his best work was written.

It was written "for fun." Burns was through

all his life the idol of his company. He was convivial, he had a way with the women, and these qualities brought him trouble. But he was not the less sought after by men of his own class who had his own taste for literature: it is true that they generally seem to have shared his other tastes also. Possibly — although Gilbert Burns reported that his brother always lived within the fair limit of his earnings as a hand on the farm — Burns was too popular to be successful as a farmer; at all events he was unsuccessful, and before two years were out emigration seemed the only resource. He heard of an opening, as an overseer of negroes in Jamaica, and it was partly with a hope to raise money for the journey that he decided to print his poems, already locally famous, at Kilmarnock. They appeared in July, 1786. The edition sold out in a month, but Burns was only £20 to the good, and Jamaica seemed inevitable, till a friend suggested an excursion to Edinburgh to see what could be done. Here, as Mr. Henley says, "he was everywhere received as he merited," and before the Edinburgh edition appeared its success was assured. The ploughman poet became a lion in what was then a true metropolis, rich in talent and well disposed to the unusual. Scott, then a growing lad, had the chance to meet him, and noted his impressions long after. "I never saw a man in company with his superiors in station and information more perfectly free from either the reality or the affectation of embarrassment." Burns came back to Mossgiel famous, and by local standards rich; he could lend his brother £180, and take for himself a new and larger farm (Ellisland in Dumfriesshire). And here he settled down with Jean Armour, who had already twice borne him children, and whom he now avowed as his wife. At the end of a year he

gave up farm labour himself, and took up a post as an excise officer, riding weekly two hundred miles on tours of inspection. Two years later again, in 1791, he sold his interest in the farm, and was promoted to a gaugership in Dumfries, in which little port he lived on till his death, in 1796, at the age of thirty-seven.

Thus his life divides itself into two periods — the first of twenty-seven years, in which he was veritably the ploughman; the second, divided from the first by a period of dazzling popularity and festivity in Edinburgh, covers only nine years, and is by far less fertile, even during the three years of it which were spent in the country; and it dwindles gradually to the guttering candle and the final darkness. Burns was through all his life habitually drunken on occasion, though he drank for conviviality, not for drunkenness; the count of his loves is numberless and squalid. Even if we bear in mind his own aphorism,

> What's done we partly may compute,
> We know not what's resisted,

it is hard to find matter for edification in the detail of his life. But he did for Scotland what hardly any other poet has done for his country, and Scotland wisely worships him. Nor is it Scotland only that owes him a debt; Wordsworth spoke the truth of Burns in the two finest lines of a fine threnody:

> Deep in the general heart of man
> His power survives.

Few poets repay study better than Burns, because few have been so much misrepresented. Scotland in her gratitude has tried to make a saint of him, and a preacher; and there is no doubt that Burns utters plenty of moral maxims. *The Cotter's Saturday Night* is probably the best known of his poems,

though *Scots wha hae* runs it close, and yet neither gives us the essential Burns. In the first place, in both the Scotch vernacular poetry is mixed with English, and Burns was never himself in English. Scots was the tongue that he spoke and thought in, Scots literature was the literature that had really formed his art; in Scots he had the finest feeling for the colour, the sound, the associations of every word. In the second place, the thought of these poems is not the characteristic thought of Burns. *The Cotter's Saturday Night* is didactic, sentimental, moralising; *Scots wha hae* is rhetorical. The true Burns is a peasant endowed with a genius for description, with a peasant's shrewd cynicism, a peasant's strong sense of realities, above all with a humour that is no less a peasant's because it is entirely his own. Only by the rarest chance does one find the true Burns in a few lines where no distinctive word of Scots occurs; and when we do, it is not in moral aphorisms nor in rhetoric.

> The wan moon is setting behind the white wave,
> And time is setting with me, oh!

These lines have the magic of lyrical romance, but they are remote as the poles from the tone of *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, which may be exemplified by a citation:

> Compar'd with this, how poor Religion's pride,
> In all the pomp of method, and of art,
> When men display to congregations wide
> Devotion's ev'ry grace, except the heart!

There you have palpable imitation of Gray—pinchbeck writing. Good work there is in the poem, when Burns uses his Lowland tongue for description; but the fire and the force which distinguish him when the whole man goes into his work are

not there. If you find them in his English it must be in the closing chorus to his *Jolly Beggars*:

Life is all a variorum,
We regard not how it goes;
Let them cant about decorum
Who have characters to lose.

Here's to budgets, bags, and wallets!
Here's to all the wandering train!
Here's our ragged brats and callets!
One and all cry out, Amen!

These admirable stanzas reveal, almost at his best, the Burns of the poems — the poet of *Tam o' Shanter*, of *The Holy Fair*, of *Holy Willie's Prayer*, the *Address to the Deil*, and many others; just as the phrase quoted before is of close kin to the Burns of two or three masterpieces in song which have the same unutterable pathos in them:

When I think on the happy days
I spent wi' you, my dearie;
And now what lands between us lie,
How can I be but eerie!

How slow ye move, ye heavy hours,
As ye were wae and weary!
It was na sae ye glinted by
When I was wi' my dearie.

Not less beautiful is the *Jacobite's Farewell*:

It was a' for our rightfu' King,
We left fair Scotland's strand;
It was a' for our rightfu' King
We e'er saw Irish land,
My dear;
We e'er saw Irish land.

Now a' is done that men can do,
And a' is done in vain;
My love and native land, farewell,
For I maun cross the main,
My dear;
For I maun cross the main.

He turn'd him right and round about
Upon the Irish shore;
And gae his bridle-reins a shake,
With Adieu for evermore,
My dear;
With Adieu for evermore.

The sodger from the wars returns,
The sailor frae the main;
But I hae parted frae my love,
Never to meet again,
My dear;
Never to meet again.

When day is gane and night is come,
And a' folk bound to sleep;
I think on him that's far awa',
The lee-lang night, and weep,
My dear;
The lee-lang night, and weep.

Yet in these lyrics it is hardly Burns himself who speaks, but rather (as Mr. Henley has urged) the immemorial genius of Scotch song that utters itself through his lips. The bulk of this later work consisted in setting words to traditional airs; some of his best songs are only improved versions of older lyrics; and in many other cases he had a phrase or two to go upon, an emotion suggested by them, and he with perfect mastery expressed the emotion. But for one of these masterpieces in the minor key you will find ten or twenty with the triumphant swaggering lilt that is Burns all over—whether he sings of a woman:

O saw ye bonnie Lesley
As she gaed o'er the border?
She's gane, like Alexander,
To spread her conquests farther,

or sings as a woman, arch, mischievous, or wheedling, as in

Last May a braw wooer cam down the lang glen,

or

What can a young lassie, what shall a young lassie,
What can a young lassie dae wi' an auld man?

The list goes on by scores, — *Duncan Gray*, *Tam Glen*, in the same key as those quoted: drinking songs, riotous, exuberant; and perhaps the most characteristic of all, *MacPherson's Lament*:

Farewell, ye dungeons dark and strong,
The wretch's destinie:
MacPherson's time will not be long
On yonder gallows tree.

CHORUS

Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,
Sae dauntingly gaed he;
He play'd a spring and danc'd it round,
Below the gallows tree.

Oh, what is death but parting breath? —
On monie a bloody plain
I've dar'd his face, and in this place
I scorn him yet again!

Untie these bands from off my hands,
And bring to me my sword!
And there's no man in all Scotland,
But I'll brave him at a word.

I've liv'd a life of sturt and strife;
I die by treacherie:
It burns my heart I must depart
And not avengèd be.

Now farewell light, thou sunshine bright,
And all beneath the sky!
May coward shame distain his name,
The wretch that dares not die!

Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,
Sae dauntingly gaed he;
He play'd a spring and danc'd it round,
Below the gallows tree.

In all of them what affects us is the spring of life, — gaiety, power, defiance. Hardly any other poetry is so elastic, so full of animal spirits. Reading Burns, one thinks of the young peasant dancing his Highland fling or Irish jig. There is the same

ceaseless spring, the same perfect timing to the rhythm ; the same swift, accurate performance of the complicated steps run trippingly off, with the continual suggestion of vigour held in check, ready to break all bounds. And if one wonders at these qualities in the songs, where a tune helps him, where the simple object is to express a single emotion, much more wonderful are they in the narrative and descriptive poems.

The Jolly Beggars is, of course, a collection of songs ; but in the " recitativo " which strings them together never for an instant does the pitch of vigour drop :

> He ended; and the kebars[1] sheuk
> Aboon the chorus' roar;
> While frighted rattons[2] backward leuk,
> And seek the benmost bore.[3]

Tam o' Shanter is pure narrative, and probably a story was never made to move faster in verse. *Hallowe'en* has no central motive to hold it together, yet stanza by stanza Burns keeps attention as if by a physical feat. He is so full of what he has to tell, so bubbling over with laughter, and he sketches figure after figure, incident after incident, with such inimitable vigour of drollery, that we cannot choose but listen. Yet, apart from *The Jolly Beggars* and *Tam o' Shanter*, if we are to find him at his best, it must be when a serious central emotion gives a purpose to his amazing powers of description. And in a number of poems that emotion is afforded by revolt against a dark, narrow ecclesiastical tyranny. Burns was passionately anti-clerical, and the gloomy, intolerant Calvinism which prevailed in his day gave him fair cause. His *Holy Fair*, a description of the Presbyterian assemblage for the

[1] Rafters. [2] Rats. [3] Innermost hole.

annual Sacrament — which seems to have been a kind of carnival of theological exhortation — is like a Hogarth picture : the different groups with their incongruous and indecent preoccupations come bodily before us, and in the centre we have the preacher :

Now a' the congregation o'er
  Is silent expectation;
For Moodie speels the holy door,
  Wi' tidings o' damnation.
Should Hornie, as in ancient days,
  'Mang sons o' God present him,
The vera sight o' Moodie's face,
  To's ain het hame had sent him
    Wi' fright that day.

Hear how he clears the points o' faith
  Wi' rattlin an' wi' thumpin!
Now meekly calm, now wild in wrath,
  He's stampin and he's jumpin!
His lengthen'd chin, his turned-up snout,
  His eldricht squeel an' gestures,
O how they fire the heart devout,
  Like cantharidian plasters,
    On sic a day!

The sequel of the service, the ale-house discussions, the love-making, and the homeward journey are all painted with the same mastery, touch after touch dashed on till we reach the edifying conclusion :

How monie hearts this day converts
  O' sinners and o' lasses!
Their hearts o' stane, gin night, are gane
  As saft as ony flesh is.
There's some are fou o' love divine,
  There's some are fou o' brandy;
An' monie jobs that day begin,
  May end in Houghmagandie
    Some ither day.

In *Holy Willie's Prayer* the satire takes even a

fiercer note. One may quote the opening thanksgiving :

O Thou, wha in the Heavens dost dwell,
Wha, as it pleases best thysel',
Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell,
A' for thy glory,
And no for ony guid or ill
They've done afore thee!

I bless and praise thy matchless might,
Whan thousands thou hast left in night,
That I am here afore thy sight,
For gifts an' grace,
A burnin an' a shinin light,
To a' this place.

The confessions which follow are too detailed to bear extract here ; the final prayer is a particular application of the thanksgiving principle, entreating God to damn certain opponents, and, in the last stanza, to magnify the supplicant :

But, Lord, remember me and mine
Wi' mercies temp'ral and divine,
That I for gear and grace may shine,
Excell'd by nane,
An' a' the glory shall be thine,
Amen, Amen.

There you have Burns inspired to the use of all his resources by an emotion not so much of hate as of revolt. It is not Holy Willie that he detests so much as the principle that Holy Willie stands for ; the code that tolerates the detestable complacency of a mind which hugs itself on its own salvation and rejoices over the downfall of unregenerates. You have Burns giving a more natural and kindly expression to the same inward instinct in the conclusion of his *Address to the Deil*. He treats the devil with the same cavalier freedom as he had treated Moodie, Holy Willie, and the rest, but, it must be said, in a spirit of much greater charity. For, after all, Burns is not afraid of the devil ; he

assumes, if one cares to put it so, that "Auld Hornie" was simply fulfilling his nature, as Robert Burns was fulfilling his, and that the ultimate issue lay not with them to decide, but must be shaped by a power who would redress and judge with insight. There is certainly a serious thought, and not merely a pose, behind the laughing tone and the rapid "crambo clink" of the rhymes, and the conclusion puts it plainly :

> An' now, auld Cloots, I ken ye're thinkin,
> A certain Bardie's rantin, drinkin,
> Some luckless hour will send him linkin,
> To your black pit;
> But, faith! he'll turn a corner jinkin,
> An' cheat you yet.
>
> But, fare you weel, auld Nickie-ben!
> O wad ye tak a thought an' men'!
> Ye aiblins might — I dinna ken —
> Still hae a stake —
> I'm wae to think upo' yon den,
> E'en for your sake!

If we are to set ourselves the question why it is that a man who was drunken and dissolute (and Burns was more than commonly to blame in his dealings with women), and whose verses may be fairly said to incite to drunkenness and loose living at least as often as they deprecate either, is yet a chief glory of his country, a spiritual influence strong for good ; the answer must be that his mind, so swift and trenchant, able to communicate itself like lightning or like sunshine, was inspired chiefly by a broad benevolence. And if we set out of sight his poems that breathe the very soul of cordial welcome and friendship between one man and another, on the ground that there lurks in them invariably some hint of the punch-bowl; or his love-verses, because we can never be sure that on the evening before he wrote *Of a' the airts the wind*

can blaw (or any other of his most touching lyrics) he had not kissed another woman than the one he was celebrating ; still there are always poems left that Auld Cloots himself cannot disparage, full of a loving fellowship and tenderness not for man or woman only, but for the dumb things. To this tenderness he sometimes gave expression in English, as in the lines on a wounded hare:

> Inhuman man! curse on thy barb'rous art,
> And blasted be thy murder-aiming eye,

and the result was tawdry enough. But when he used his own tongue to write of the beasts he loved — of Poor Mailie, his old ewe, of his mare (worn out now, but honoured in her descendants), of the field mouse whose nest the coulter shatters, or generally of the helpless and appealing — then, he was a poet. The opening stanzas of *A Winter Night* may be cited for an example of his mastery in description as well as for the expression of this perfectly sincere emotion :

> When biting Boreas, fell and doure,
> Sharp shivers thro' the leafless bow'r;
> When Phoebus gies a short-liv'd glow'r,
> Far south the lift,
> Dim-dark'ning thro' the flaky show'r,
> Or whirling drift:
>
> Ae night the storm the steeples rocked,
> Poor Labour sweet in sleep was locked,
> While burns, wi' snawy wreeths up-choked,
> Wild-eddying swirl,
> Or thro' the mining outlet bocked,
> Down headlong hurl.
>
> List'ning, the doors an' winnocks rattle,
> I thought me on the ourie cattle,
> Or silly sheep, wha bide this brattle
> O' winter war,
> And thro' the drift, deep-lairing, sprattle,
> Beneath a scar.

Ilk happing bird, wee, helpless thing
That, in the merry months o' spring,
Delighted me to hear thee sing,
What comes o' thee?
Whare wilt thou cow'r thy chittering wing,
An' close thy e'e?

Not less admirable, though lying nearer to prose, is the poem of *The Twa Dogs*, where Burns not only makes us feel his love and understanding of the friendly brutes, but, as it were, uses them to reflect back on to men his sense of an all-pervading fellowship. The life of the poor, in its pleasures and its hardships, has never been so well set out as by "honest Luath"; and whoever wishes to understand what Burns, not as the lyric poet, but as the shrewd and humorous moralist, has meant to his country-folk, gentle and simple, cannot find a poem that will better suggest it. He preaches a gospel of content, resting not on a contempt of pleasure, but on a keen sense of the value and dignity, the beauty and richness, of human existence and human fellowship; a content which is only heightened by the need of effort. There was no poet less moral in his life than Burns; there is none more explicitly a moralist in his writings. One may prefer the songs where he utters emotion simply to the less lyrical poems where he propounds a philosophy — whether it be that of *The Twa Dogs* or that of *The Jolly Beggars* — but one cannot deny that the whole man is to be found only in the latter class. And if one must justify him by a comparison, let him be compared with Byron, his only modern rival in full masculine vigour and easy breadth of style. Even those who praise Byron most will admit that his nature upon any test shows warped and cankered; but no one can ignore the spring of unspoilt humanity in Burns.

CHAPTER XV

THE TRANSITION FROM THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

A TRUE landmark in English literature is William Blake, who was born in 1757, and before he was fourteen, had written such verse as this :

How sweet I roamed from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride;
Till I the Prince of Love beheld,
Who in the sunny beams did glide.

He showed me lilies for my hair,
And blushing roses for my brow:
He led me through his gardens fair,
Where all his golden pleasures grow.

With sweet May-dews my wings were wet,
And Phoebus fired my vocal rage;
He caught me in his silken net,
And shut me in his golden cage.

He loves to sit and hear me sing,
Then laughing, sports and plays with me;
Then stretches out my golden wing,
And mocks my loss of liberty.

Except for the single line, "Phoebus fired my vocal rage," which is purely of the eighteenth century, this is verse which might have been

written in the day of Marlowe or of Herrick. Again, in the *Songs of Innocence*, when we read the opening numbers, it seems to be the very voice of Wordsworth — or rather of Wordsworth's gentler sister, had she ever written verse:

Piping down the valleys wild,
  Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
  And he laughing said to me:

"Pipe a song about a lamb":
  So I piped with merry cheer.
"Piper, pipe that song again";
  So I piped; he wept to hear.

"Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe,
  Sing thy songs of happy cheer":
So I sung the same again,
  While he wept with joy to hear.

"Piper, sit thee down and write
  In a book that all may read"—
So he vanished from my sight;
  And I plucked a hollow reed,

And I made a rural pen,
  And I stained the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs,
  Every child may joy to hear.

The Song of the Chimney Sweeper is a sort of forerunner of Wordsworth's *At the Corner of Wood Street* in manner and in feeling; but probably Wordsworth knew nothing of Blake. The same principle, however, was at work in both. To Blake, the working engraver, draughtsman as well as poet, and mystic before all, it was as though the whole laboriously-built tradition of English literature, from Dryden, to Goldsmith and Johnson down had no existence. He went straight back to the springs of English poetry — but he carried no one in his company. He was no propagandist;

and his work, whether the first *Poetical Sketches*, the *Songs of Innocence*, or *Songs of Experience*, or the later and more visionary *Book of Thel*, all appeared unnoticed. A fountain of beauty was opened, and we return to it to-day ; but it flowed only to itself, it watered no barren land.

More important for our purpose, inasmuch as he set more of a mark on his time, is the poet William Cowper, who, with Crabbe, forms a sort of bridge between the age of Pope and the age of Wordsworth. He was born in 1731; his death in 1800 makes a convenient point to remember. What we know of his uneventful life is singularly interesting. He came of a family of great Whig lawyers, but a lack of hardness in his composition neutralised the advantages of his birth. And at the age of six he lost his mother. Fifty years later a wave of emotion swept over him at the sight of her picture and found expression in perhaps his best verses. He had cause to remember the loss, for he was sent at once to a boarding-school, an apt subject for torture, and he did not escape it. His experiences gave force to *Tirocinium*, the one of his "Moral Satires" which deals with education. Later experiences of school life at Westminster were happier, and when in early manhood he entered the Temple as a law student he appears to have been a gay and amiable member of a group who dabbled in literature. He fell in love like other young men, but his uncle, whose daughter Theodora was the desired object, refused consent, and with good reason. But Theodora never married, and there is strong evidence that far on into old age Cowper held a foremost place in her thoughts. The man's personality, for all its gentle, feminine type, had a strong power of attraction over women.

At the age of thirty-two the disease of his mind, hypochondriacal madness, developed itself. Being nominated to a pleasant post, that of Clerk of the Journals in the House of Lords, he fell to morbid terrors of doubt over his fitness, and finally tried to hang himself. The garter broke, and he was found on the floor insensible, saved, but only to sound the depths of religious mania. Seclusion in a private asylum sent him out partly cured, but in large measure dependent on his relatives for support. They settled him in the town of Huntingdon, where, after some months, he made friends with Mr. Unwin, a clergyman, his wife, and his son. That friendship was Cowper's salvation.

England was then in the full tide of the Evangelical revival, and the Unwins were devout, but not morose. They charmed Cowper, and he became an inmate of their house, paying his contribution to household expenses. Two years later Mr. Unwin died, but an indissoluble tie had grown up between his wife and her guest. He was nearly forty, she was seven years older, and they continued to make their home together, living as mother and son. They fixed their abode at Olney, whither they were attracted by the presence of a remarkable revivalist, John Newton, then a clergyman, once captain of a slaver. Under the violent spiritual excitement which this well-meaning man administered, Cowper's mind again gave way. He became convinced that he was lost irretrievably: sheer lunacy followed, through which Mrs. Unwin tended him, though the lunatic, after the nature of his disease, imputed hatred and evil designs to her. At last sanity was restored by the help of medicine, and in a happy hour Newton left Olney. His successor, Bull, had a more genial piety, and was a true and good friend to the poet.

Cowper was now close on fifty, and at Mrs. Unwin's advice he reverted to literature. Newton indeed had already set him to hymn writing : and now Mrs. Unwin urged on him didactic poetry. The result was *Table Talk* and the other *Moral Satires*, written in the orthodox eighteenth-century couplets. This volume, though it does not show Cowper at his best, reveals that mixture of fine observation and humour, which makes his private correspondence more delightful than any of his works designed for publicity. A passage may be cited from *Truth*.

> Yon ancient prude, whose wither'd features show
> She might be young some forty years ago,
> Her elbows pinion'd close upon her hips,
> Her head erect, her fan upon her lips,
> Her eyebrows arch'd, her eyes both gone astray
> To watch yon amorous couple in their play,
> With bony and unkerchief'd neck defies
> The rude inclemency of wintry skies,
> And sails with lappet-head and mincing airs
> Daily at clink of bell, to morning prayers.
> To thrift and parsimony much inclined,
> She yet allows herself that boy behind;
> The shivering urchin, bending as he goes,
> With slipshod heels, and dew-drop at his nose,
> His predecessor's coat advanced to wear,
> Which future pages are yet doom'd to share ;
> Carries her Bible tuck'd beneath his arm,
> And hides his hands to keep his fingers warm.

Some time later, a new influence came into the recluse's life. Lady Austen, a brilliant widow, who had lived much in the world both of English and French society, called upon Mrs. Unwin, and her vivacity charmed Cowper. Friendship sprang up suddenly on both sides, and Lady Austen took the vicarage in Olney ; and soon a private way was opened between the two gardens, and the trio passed their days together, Cowper devoting him-

self alternately to each lady. It was under this influence that there was written, first *John Gilpin*, then the stanzas on *The Loss of the Royal George*: two masterpieces in very different kinds. And lastly, it was Lady Austen who suggested that he should write, not moral satires dealing with a world that reached him only through newspapers, but a poem of his own experience. She gave him for a subject her Sofa; so came into being *The Task*, in which Cowper adopted the loosest of all frameworks upon which to string together his own thoughts and observations and emotions — emotions essentially meditative and tranquil, such as the joys of a quiet walk in summer, or of fireside evenings when winter rules.

It is by this work that Cowper reaches forward to Wordsworth. He holds like Wordsworth that out of the commonest stuff of life poetry may be made; like Wordsworth he departs from the vague conventionalities of "poetic diction," and describes minutely and precisely what he sees, as here in the *Winter Morning's Walk*:

> The cattle mourn in corners where the fence
> Screens them, and seem half-petrified to sleep
> *In unrecumbent sadness.* There they wait
> Their wonted fodder; not like hungering man,
> Fretful if unsupplied; but silent, meek,
> And patient of the slow-paced swain's delay.
> *He from the stack carves out the accustomed load.*
> *Deep-plunging, and again deep-plunging oft,*
> *His broad keen knife into the solid mass:*
> *Smooth as a wall the upright remnant stands*
> *With such undeviating and even force*
> *He severs it away:* no needless care,
> Lest storms should overset the leaning pile
> Deciduous, or its own unbalanced weight.
> Forth goes the woodman, leaving unconcern'd
> The cheerful haunts of man; to wield the axe
> And drive the wedge in yonder forest drear,
> From morn to eve, his solitary task.

Shaggy, and lean, and shrewd, with pointed ears
And tail cropped short, half lurcher and half cur,
His dog attends him. Close behind his heel
Now creeps he slow; and now with many a frisk
Wide-scampering, snatches up the drifted snow
With ivory teeth, or ploughs it with his snout;
Then shakes his powder'd coat and barks for joy.
Heedless of all his pranks, the sturdy churl
Moves right toward the mark; nor stops for aught
But now and then with pressure of his thumb
To adjust the fragrant charge of a short tube,
That fumes beneath his nose; the trailing cloud
Streams far behind him, scenting all the air.

There is no rapture, no exaltation, but the objects are seen as they must be in all art, through a sincere emotion — which is here a quiet contemplative pleasure. Lady Austen deserves well of the world ; for she had the tact to see that Cowper, to attain success, must express himself and his emotions, rather than his pious opinions ; she perceived also, it seems, that he would do better if freed from the restraint of Pope's metre.

But, it appears, friendship broke down. *The Task* to some extent replaced the inspirer of *The Task* ; and Lady Austen was not content without an atmosphere of sentiment. For this Cowper had no desire, and it seems also that Mrs. Unwin was gently jealous. She was not, however, jealous of the other distinguished and charming woman, Lady Hesketh, Theodora's sister, who took Lady Austen's place : and there were sunny years, brightened by the fame which *The Task*, published in 1785, had brought to its author. After various attempts at other original compositions, Cowper turned to the great labour of translating Homer — employing blank verse as his medium. Of far more real importance are the delightful humorous poems of domestic incidents — such as his epic Encounter with a viper in the backyard, and, in a very different rank, the *Lines*

on his Mother's Picture, and the never-to-be-over-praised sonnet and verses *To Mary Unwin*.

Cowper must always be read by the student of verse, as marking a stage in the spiral of evolution from Pope to Wordsworth. His case is the more notable, as he read little, and was consciously influenced by no models in literature, most of which from his religious standpoint he regarded as vanity. But he had a deep admiration for Milton, whom he followed in his blank verse as far as was possible for a man with little ear for the subtler and more intricate harmonies of language. He retains an interest too, historically, as the poet who gave voice to the religious revival of the eighteenth century, and his gentle puritanism will always be congenial to certain typically English natures. The charm of his personality survives, above all, in the passages which describe his joy in the pet animals with which he kept off gloom ; his hares are among the immortals. But for the lover of what may be called the most essential poetry — of the things which we all should wish to know by heart — he offers little, yet that is of the best. The *Lines on the Royal George* have never been surpassed for a certain noble baldness of statement and restraint of emotion. The central thought — a loss so great, upon a cause so trivial — is set out with more force in a few score of words than the eloquence of Burke could have compassed by accumulated splendour. A poem suggested by the story of Alexander Selkirk shows an extraordinary power of interpretation marred by a jigging metre. But the dramatic intensity with which in this poem Cowper set to words the lonely wretchedness of a solitary, is far surpassed by *The Castaway*, that great and terrible lyric, which came as a cry from the blackness of his last days.

For the long companionship failed in the end. Lady Hesketh's waning health drove her to Bath. And Mary Unwin, who had supported Cowper through the gloom of hypochondria, now sank herself into a mental torpor, and Cowper relapsed into his horrors of damnation. One of the most pathetic things in literary history is thus told by Mr. Goldwin Smith:

> Six days he sat motionless and silent, almost refusing to take food. His physician suggested, as the only chance of arousing him, that Mrs. Unwin should be induced, if possible, to invite him to go out with her; with difficulty she was made to understand what they wanted her to do; at last she said that it was a fine morning, and she should like a walk. Her partner at once rose and placed her arm in his. Almost unconsciously, she had rescued him from the evil spirit for the last time.

It was a flash only; and at last she, the happier, died. He lived on, to write his *Castaway*, which tells of a strong swimmer washed overboard at night, struggling on, while his comrades heard the cries, and flung casks overboard to buoy him, yet knowing that they could at best prolong the agony. The poem tells of the swimmer's struggle, tells how, and in what bitterness of spirit, he sank; and then it tells the purpose of its telling:

> No poet wept him; but the page
> Of narrative sincere,
> That tells his name, his worth, his age,
> Is wet with Anson's tear;
> And tears by bards or heroes shed
> Alike immortalise the dead.
>
> I therefore purpose not, or dream,
> Descanting on his fate,
> To give the melancholy theme
> A more enduring date:
> But misery still delights to trace
> Its semblance in another's case.

No voice divine the storm allay'd
No light propitious shone,
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
We perished, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.

Listen how the engulfing chaos surges in with that word "whelm'd." It is the last cry of Cowper's gentle spirit, driven to the black pit of despair.

The student of English literature in its evolution must also be recommended to bestow some study on the work of Cowper's younger contemporary, George Crabbe, whose first important poem, *The Village*, was published in 1783. Crabbe represents at once the reaction against the artificial conventions in poetry, which Pope's influence had supported, and also almost the latest imitation of Pope's literary technique. Throughout his long career — his *Tales of the Hall* were published in 1819 — he adhered rigidly to the decasyllable couplet as a medium for his narrative verse; but the substance of his work is severe in its realism. As his own phrase puts it:

I paint the cot,
As Truth will paint it, and as bards will not.

His method, however, is that of the novelist in verse rather than that of the poet — such as Wordsworth — whose aim is in describing to transfigure; to show, not the wretchedness of the "leech gatherer upon the lonely moor," but his sublimity; and it may fairly be said that Crabbe fails as a poet, and suffers no undeserved neglect. A specimen may be given to show how close an observation governed his art of description:

Rank weeds, that every art and care defy,
Reign o'er the land and rob the blighted rye;

> Then thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,
> And to the ragged infant threaten war;
> There poppies nodding, mock the hope of toil;
> *There the blue bugloss paints the sterile soil.*

That is observation as minute as Tennyson's — but how far from his charm of style and metre! It will be noted that Crabbe overlaps the age of the nineteenth-century poets. *Tales of the Hall* was published after Scott had ceased to write verse; and their author actually outlived Keats, Shelley, and Byron.

But of infinitely higher importance than Crabbe is the great novelist with whom Crabbe was a favourite author, and whose work, though published in the nineteenth century, belongs by temper and affinities wholly to the eighteenth — Jane Austen.

In 1778, ten years after death had closed Sterne's meteoric career, there appeared anonymously a novel, told in Richardson's epistolary method, entitled *Evelina: or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World.* It caught the popular fancy, and deservedly, by the freshness with which it depicted the emotions of a very young girl when first exposed to the excitement of courtship and society — a society in which she is handicapped by the vulgarity of her relatives; and its authoress, Miss Fanny Burney, found herself taken up and petted by the leaders of literature, notably by Johnson. *Cecilia* followed in 1782, and in this the epistolary method was abandoned. A place at Court was bestowed on the talented young lady, and a very miserable promotion she found it — debarring her from all further literary activities for a long space. We can most of us read with delight these two novels; but their main importance in literature

is that they served as models to the daughter of a clergyman living at Steventon in Hampshire. Between 1796 and 1798 Jane Austen, who in the latter year was only three-and-twenty, wrote *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Northanger Abbey*. The title of her first book avows discipleship, for it is borrowed from a passage in *Cecilia*, where Dr. Lyster summing up observes that "The whole of this unfortunate business has been the result of PRIDE AND PREJUDICE." And a notable digression in *Northanger Abbey* puts explicitly the new novelist's protest against what was certainly a prevailing cant in criticism, while it emphasises her admiration for her forerunner. Catherine Morland, she relates, and her friend Isabella Allen, "on wet days shut themselves up to read novels together." Here the narrator breaks off to deprecate "that ungenerous and impolitic custom, so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure, the very performances to the number of which they are themselves adding":

> Let us not desert one another: we are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers; and while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the *History of England*, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the *Spectator*, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogised by a thousand pens, there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them. "I am no novel reader; I seldom look into novels; do not imagine that *I* often read novels; it is really very well for a novel." Such is the common cant. "And what are you reading, miss—?" "Oh! it is only a novel!" replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame.

"It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda; or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language." Now, had the same young lady been engaged with a volume of the *Spectator*, instead of such a work, how proudly would she have produced the book, and told its name! though the chances must be against her being occupied by any part of that voluminous publication of which either the matter or manner would not disgust the young person of taste; the substance of its papers so often consisting in the statement of improbable circumstances, unnatural characters, and topics of conversation, which no longer concern any one living; and their language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it.

The charge is amply justified by the portion of contemporary neglect which the author had to experience. Her first two books were written and put away unpublished; *Northanger Abbey* was purchased by a bookseller at Bath for ten pounds, and pigeon-holed indefinitely; and at that point Miss Austen stopped writing for a period of ten years, most of which were spent in Bath, which was then an important social centre. When the family left Bath to return to the country, desire for amusement (probably) induced the authoress to return to story writing, limiting herself still to such scenes and characters as her very uneventful middle-class existence had made familiar to her satiric observation. In 1811 a publisher was found at last to produce one of her books — *Sense and Sensibility*. *Pride and Prejudice* appeared two years later, followed by two novels of her later period — *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. She died in 1718, aged only forty-three, leaving her last book, *Persuasion*, still in manuscript; it appeared posthumously, as did *Northanger Abbey*, which had slept for all these years in the drawers of the Bath

bookseller. The limited nature of her contemporary success may be judged from the fact that he returned it to her family at the same modest price as had originally been paid for it.

There is hardly another prose writer whose work is so equal, so limited, and so impeccable. Passion has no place in it, though she will show you a young lady (in *Mansfield Park*) sacrificing her reputation to jealous vanity. Virtues and vices display themselves in the most trivial manifestations; Mrs. Norreys, one of the most detestable characters in all fiction, hardly does anything more positively wicked than exposing the gentle Fanny to a possible sunstroke. Anne Elliot, in *Persuasion*, is indeed a figure of the finest constancy in love, and she is visited with the tortures of jealousy; but never for an instant does her creator strike the note of romance. The whole is kept in the key of fine, subtle, unobtrusive comedy, achieving great results within the smallest possible range. Her men are seen, doubtless, from a woman's point of view, and only in their relations with women ; in proportion as they belong more to the world of action they are less fully presented. We know much less, for example, about Captain Wentworth, Anne's lover, than we do about Anne's father, the valetudinarian Mr. Woodhouse. But whatever is presented is presented with the same truth and finish of portraiture — though in some cases the subject may be only partially seen. The clergy were of mankind those with whom a lady living quietly in the country or a provincial town would be naturally most familiar, and her portraits of the clergy merit Macaulay's enthusiasm. One of them displays himself pretty thoroughly in the following pages from *Pride and Prejudice*, which, let it be remembered, was written before Miss Austen was one-and-twenty:

Mrs. Bennet and Kitty walked off, and as soon as they were gone, Mr. Collins began:

"Believe me, my dear Miss Elizabeth, that your modesty, so far from doing you any disservice, rather adds to your other perfections. You would have been less amiable in my eyes had there *not* been this little unwillingness; but allow me to assure you, that I have your respected mother's permission for this address. You can hardly doubt the purport of my discourse, however your natural delicacy may lead you to dissemble; my attentions have been too marked to be mistaken. Almost as soon as I entered the house, I singled you out as the companion of my future life. But before I am run away with by my feelings on this subject, perhaps it would be advisable for me to state my reasons for marrying — and, moreover, for coming into Hertfordshire with the design of selecting a wife, as I certainly did."

The idea of Mr. Collins, with all his solemn composure, being run away with by his feelings, made Elizabeth so near laughing, that she could not use the short pause he allowed in any attempt to stop him farther, and he continued:

"My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly — which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier — that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness. Twice has she condescended to give me her opinion (unasked too!) on this subject; and it was but the very Saturday night before I left Hunsford — between our pools at quadrille, while Mrs. Jenkinson was arranging Miss De Bourgh's footstool — that she said, 'Mr. Collins, you must marry. A clergyman like you must marry. Choose properly, choose a gentlewoman for *my* sake; and for your *own*, let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice. Find such a woman as soon as you can, bring her to Hunsford, and I will visit her.' Allow me, by the way, to observe, my fair cousin, that I do not reckon the notice and kindness of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, as among the least of the advantages in my power to offer. You will find her manners beyond anything I can describe; and your wit and vivacity, I think, must be acceptable to her, especially when tempered with the silence and respect which her rank will inevitably excite. Thus much for my general intention in favour of matrimony; it remains to be told why my views were directed

to Longbourn instead of my own neighbourhood, where I assure you there are many amiable young women. But the fact is, that being, as I am, to inherit this estate after the death of your honoured father (who, however, may live many years longer), I could not satisfy myself without resolving to choose a wife from among his daughters, that the loss to them might be as little as possible, when the melancholy event takes place — which, however, as I have already said, may not be for several years. This has been my motive, my fair cousin, and I flatter myself it will not sink me in your esteem. And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection. To fortune, I am perfectly indifferent, and shall make no demand of that nature on your father, since I am well aware that it could not be complied with; and that one thousand pounds in the 4 per cents., which will not be yours till after your mother's decease, is all that you may ever be entitled to. On that head, therefore, I shall be uniformly silent; and you may assure yourself that no ungenerous reproach shall ever pass my lips when we are married."

It was absolutely necessary to interrupt him now.

"You are too hasty, sir," she cried. "You forget that I have made no answer. Let me do it without further loss of time. Accept my thanks for the compliment you are paying me. I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than decline them."

"I am not now to learn," replied Mr. Collins, with a formal wave of the hand, "that it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour; and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second or even a third time. I am therefore by no means discouraged by what you have just said, and shall hope to lead you to the altar ere long."

"Upon my word, sir," cried Elizabeth, "your hope is rather an extraordinary one after my declaration. I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal. You could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make *you* so. Nay, were your friend Lady Catherine to know me, I am persuaded she would find me in every respect ill-qualified for the situation."

"Were it certain that Lady Catherine would think so," said Mr. Collins very gravely — "but I cannot imagine that her ladyship would at all disapprove of you. And you may be

certain that when I have the honour of seeing her again, I shall speak in the highest terms of your modesty, economy, and other amiable qualifications."

The lack of contemporary fame — though her work, when it got itself published, was warmly appreciated by the elect — has been made up to Jane Austen by a chorus of posthumous enthusiasm. Scott, after his fashion, praised her nobly, and, after his not less constant fashion, depreciated his own work by comparison. Macaulay said that she came next to Shakespeare in the art of delineating human nature. The case against her — emphasising her limitations — requires to be put, and it has never been put so well as by another great novelist, Charlotte Brontë :

> She does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well. . . . She ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound. The passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood. . . . Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands, and feet. What sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study; but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of life and the sentient target of death — this Miss Austen ignores. Jane Austen was a complete and most sensible lady, but a very incomplete and rather insensible (not *senseless*) woman. If this is heresy, I cannot help it.

The truth, as usual, lies between the two extremes of statement. Anne Elliot feels, and deeply. And in any case Miss Austen is perhaps the most finished artist in English fiction. Her style, like herself, it should be noted, is fully of the eighteenth century. Sir Henry Craik points out with justice that it is closely modelled on what is most excellent in Johnson.

CHAPTER XVI

SCOTT

The period in English literature which lies between the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 and the death of Scott in 1831, is only less wonderful than the wonderful age of Elizabeth and James. It includes the whole work of Scott, Byron, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Lamb, with all that is vital of Wordsworth's. The output, so infinitely varied, is difficult to group. Chronologically, and in a sense logically, Wordsworth and Coleridge come first; they were the men who formulated the principles of the reaction; and though for long they were ignored or misconceived by the public and the critics, they had full effect on the poets. Coleridge's influence is felt by Scott, and more strongly by Byron, in verse technique; Lamb was Coleridge's friend and disciple. But there can be no question that first Scott, and then Byron, became notable, long before the rest; theirs was the original impact on the public mind; they were the first who altered the public taste; and with them accordingly we shall begin.

Walter Scott, the most lovable figure in all letters, is one of those persons who cannot be

understood without reference to their pedigree. Born in 1771, he descended from a lesser branch of the great Scott clan, whose feudal head was the Duke of Buccleuch. The father of his grandfather's grandfather was Auld Wat of Harden, whose name, he says, "I have made to ring in many a ditty, with that of his wife, the 'Flower of Yarrow.'" His great-grandfather was a Jacobite, who lost lands and goods in the Stuart cause, and was known through Teviotdale as "Beardie," from the venerable beard, then portentous as a comet, which he cherished in regret for the exiled house. Jacobite sentiment came to Scott in full force through his father, an Edinburgh writer to the signet (attorney); and it is easy to trace in Sir Walter, the man of letters and the enthusiast for a Hanoverian sovereign, lineaments of the Border rider and the Stuart partisan.

Scott's childhood decided his career. Convulsions in his second year left him with a shrunk leg, and threw him upon stories for amusement. He was sent for country air to live with his grandfather near Smailholme Tower, and his earliest recollections go back to this place, where he was bred up among old songs and tales, and met men who remembered the butcherings after Culloden. Only thirty years, let it be noted, had gone by since "the Forty-five." He has told us of it all himself:

> Thus while I ape the measure wild
> Of tales that charm'd me yet a child,
> Rude though they be, still with the chime
> Return the thoughts of early time;
> And feelings, roused in life's first day,
> Glow in the line, and prompt the lay.
> Then rise those crags, that mountain tower
> Which charm'd my fancy's wakening hour.
> Though no broad river swept along,
> To claim, perchance, heroic song;

Though sigh'd no groves in summer gale,
To prompt of love a softer tale;
Though scarce a puny streamlet's speed
Claim'd homage from a shepherd's reed;
Yet was poetic impulse given,
By the green hill and clear blue heaven.
It was a barren scene, and wild,
Where naked cliffs were rudely piled;
But ever and anon between
Lay velvet tufts of loveliest green;
And well the lonely infant knew
Recesses where the wall-flower grew,
And honeysuckle loved to crawl
Up the low crag and ruin'd wall.
I deem'd such nooks the sweetest shade
The sun in all its round survey'd;
And still I thought that shatter'd tower
The mightiest work of human power;
And marvell'd, as the aged hind
With some strange tale bewitch'd my mind,
Of forayers, who, with headlong force,
Down from that strength had spurr'd their horse,
Their southern rapine to renew,
Far in the distant Cheviots blue,
And, home returning, fill'd the hall
With revel, wassel-rout, and brawl.
Methought that still with trump and clang,
The gateway's broken arches rang;
Methought, grim features, seam'd with scars,
Glared through the window's rusty bars,
And ever, by the winter hearth,
Old tales I heard of woe or mirth,
Of lovers' slights, of ladies' charms,
Of witches' spells, of warriors' arms;
Of patriot battles, won of old
By Wallace wight and Bruce the bold;
Of later fields of feud and fight,
When, pouring from their Highland height,
The Scottish clans, in headlong sway,
Had swept the scarlet ranks away.
While stretch'd at length upon the floor,
Again I fought each combat o'er,
Pebbles and shells in order laid,
The mimic ranks of war display'd;
And onward still the Scottish Lion bore,
And still the scatter'd Southron fled before.

At the age of seven, near Prestonpans, he had much talk with a veteran of the German Wars, one Dalgetty — a name destined to immortality; here also he met George Constable, afterward sketched as the Antiquary (though a deal of Scott himself went to complete Monkbarns). This friend turned him loose on Shakespeare, whom he came to know literally by heart. Lameness still made of him the all-devouring reader, which, without that disability, one so impassioned for outdoor sports might hardly have become. But at the age of fifteen a severe illness seemed a crisis, and he emerged from it still lame indeed, but immensely strong, and even a tireless walker.

While still a lad he was put to the law, and showed no excessive application. But whatever was antique had its interest for Scott, and the lawyer is constantly evident in his novels. His taste for reading lasted, but he gathered knowledge other ways than from books. History appealed to him, but specially the rough history of the Border, enshrined not only in prose, but in numberless ballads that he had by heart; and year after year he explored the recesses of the dales, above all Liddesdale, where in those days no wheeled vehicle penetrated. The geniality which made him everywhere the best beloved of companions, endeared him no less to the Dandie Dinmonts and their wives than to his fellow-advocates. He was writing nothing; but as Mr. Shortreed, his companion in these "raids," wrote later, "he was making himself all the time."

Like the fine healthy youth that he was, he fell in love, and there followed "three years of dreaming and two of awakening." The lady's parents interposed; shortly afterwards she was married to Sir William Forbes of Pitsligo. Scott uttered his

feeling in lines which, alone of all the writings that he published, have the note of personal emotion:

The violet in her greenwood bower,
Where birchen boughs with hazels mingle,
May boast itself the fairest flower
In glen, or copse, or forest dingle.

Though fair her gems of azure hue,
Beneath the dewdrop's weight reclining,
I've seen an eye of lovelier blue,
More sweet through watery lustre shining.

The summer sun that dew shall dry,
Ere yet the day be past its morrow;
Nor longer in my false love's eye
Remained the tear of parting sorrow.

Less than a year later he was engaged, and shortly afterwards married to Miss Charpentier, daughter of a French émigré. "The heart still shaken by the swell of an old passion is readier to entertain a new one than the heart which is at rest." But Scott's first love struck deep. Though we have little record of his emotions in his work, we have now his *Journal*, and it should be read by all who wish to see into the mind of a great and good man. In the crash of his fortunes, and after his wife's death, we read how he received a letter from the lady of his first attachment, and it seemed to him "like a summons from the grave." A few days later he writes:

I went to make another visit, and fairly softened myself like an old fool by recalling old stories till I was fit for nothing but shedding tears and repeating verses for the whole night. This is sad work. The very grave gives up its dead, and time rolls back thirty years to add to my perplexities. I don't care. I begin to grow overhardened, and, like a stag turning at bay, my naturally good temper grows fierce and dangerous. Yet what a romance to tell, and told, I fear, it will one day be; and then my three years of dreaming and two years of awakening will be chronicled doubtless. But the dead will feel no pain.

It was in Scott's "years of dreaming" that the habit of composition, dropped since early boyhood, returned to him: and his first inspiration came to him from a German source, through the medium of "Monk" Lewis, the first full-blown author whom Scott foregathered with. Lewis was busy popularising the German spectral ballads, and Scott tried his hand at a version of Bürger's *Lenore*. Approbation quickened him, he became increasingly mixed up with literary persons; moreover in 1799 his appointment as Sheriff of Selkirkshire made him independent of the bar. About the same time he fell in with an old school acquaintance, James Ballantyne, who then had a printing press in Kelso. Scott asked Ballantyne to print and bind up for him a small number of Scotch ballads for private distribution; and thus originated the idea of a larger work in which lay the germ of all his later achievement.

For long years he had been collecting ballads. Of late he had been at work imitating them. The new project was to bring together "the Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border," prefacing each ballad with some account of the personages or the usages it referred to. Since the momentous publication of Percy's *Reliques*, several such collections had appeared, and every editor had had his own theory of treating the text. Scott, like Percy, amended and altered freely, but with a finer instinct. Many old ballads he positively re-wrote. Some new ones of his own, on ancient traditional subjects, he included, with others by his friends. It was an experiment in poetry. But also in the search for local and historical illustration of the stories told in the ballads, he had turned over the stuff of a hundred romances; and shortly after the publication of the *Minstrelsy* in 1802 he began

Waverley, a prose tale of "the Forty-five." But this was dropped, for the time. For in his editorial work he had formed the theory that the ballad was a degenerate form of the longer mediaeval romance, shortened and simplified to the uses of a peasant audience and illiterate recorders; and when the *Minstrelsy* was well received, he set himself to reproduce not only the ballad, but the "lay." The result was *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, which, published in 1805, took the world by storm. Here was poetry, not content, like that of Cowper, then the most popular author, to appeal for judicious approbation; it came with a rush and ring, carrying readers off their feet. It was not a modification, but a revolution in the theory of poetic art. Macpherson and Percy in their different manners had paved the way for a poetry that should be in the most obvious way poetical; remote, by subject as by temper, from the whole world of prose. People did not stop to consider whether, in the fiery recital of adventure, or the long description of mountain and wood, lake and river, castle and abbey, there were heard those inner voices which hang about the greatest poetry like echoes: they were enchanted out of criticism. And, let it be said once and for all, the legendary and romantic world into which Scott took them, was no mere figment of his imagination. He knew Border history as well as the history of his own day: he had grown up in its atmosphere; every old peel tower spoke to him of it; the old war-horns, which in times past had sounded the "fray" and were still preserved in Border steadings, with the other "rowth o' auld knick-knackets" that he lifted in his Liddesdale raids, were part and parcel of a life hardly dead yet. His Dandie Dinmonts, whom he knew in the flesh, were but little removed

from the type of Kinmont Willie in the ballad and "the Kinmont" was own brother to "William of Deloraine good at need." Scott was on the Border and of the Border; the world of his Border romances was hardly one remove from reality. He did not choose a subject because he wanted to write romantic poetry; the subject imposed itself on him. *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake* followed at brief intervals, and the vein showed no sign of flagging. In *Rokeby* and *The Lord of the Isles* it runs weaker; and perhaps the truth is, that in those years of Napoleonic war the present usurped upon the past. Yet his *Field of Waterloo* is a failure: the genius of Wellington inspired no poet; and in any case war has never (except by Aeschylus) been celebrated in great contemporary verse. It needs the mellowing distance.

Besides the gradual flagging, which Scott must himself have perceived, there was now a rival in the field. Byron was writing narrative poetry, which eclipsed Scott's in vigour, and had a magic of fascination that outdid the Wizard's. Scott's own account of it is simple: "Byron *bet* me." But he must have felt, however vaguely, that there were powers in him that had yet found no outlet — chief of them, his supreme faculty of humorous characterisation. He turned back to the half-finished tale of *Waverley*, wrote it off, and took it to Ballantyne, who advised him to strike out the humorous passages as vulgar. So high in those days was the standard of refinement. *Waverley*, as all the world has heard, was published anonymously, in 1814, and very soon the "Great Unknown" was known to the last limits of English settlement; each successive novel being read as if it were the bulletin of a victory. And though the authorship was for long years unacknowledged, Scott grew increasingly

famous. Money flowed in, enabling him without risk, as it seemed, to gratify his dearest ambition and found a great territorial family. He built the house at Abbotsford, and crowded it with company through long years of the fullest and most vigorous life, till suddenly a crash came.

His prosperity and energy seemed inexhaustible. In 1806 he had been appointed Clerk of the Session, a legal office of distinction with a good salary, which, it must be remembered, kept him at legal work in court for five or six hours daily during half the year. This work, Scott wrote in his *Journal* in 1827, was rather "an amusement than otherwise." Moreover "it keeps one in the course and stream of actual life, which is a great advantage to a literary man." We have in that shrewd remark a key to Scott's perennial freshness. He was a book-lover, but never bookish ; he never lost a living and first-hand touch with human affairs. But few men can conduct a profession and write, as he wrote, two or three large volumes a year. Scott's strength enabled him to accomplish it by his regular habit of early rising ; he could write a chapter before breakfast. So equipped, it seems amazing that money trouble should have ever touched him ; for when he was put to it, he earned £28,000 in two years by his pen ; and lavish though his expenses were, they were not disproportionate.

Secret speculation was his ruin. The success of the *Minstrelsy* induced Ballantyne to move to Edinburgh, and when the *Lay* had brought in money Scott embarked as a partner with the printers, who gradually took to publishing also. Between 1806 and 1814, in addition to his poems, he edited and published with them the complete works of Dryden and Swift, each a tremendous task. In 1813 came the first financial crisis, for

the firm had succeeded only with Scott's own books ; but disaster was staved off by agreement with another publisher, Constable, who had become prosperous by the *Edinburgh Review*, and who took over the publishing part of the business. In the next year *Waverley* came, to make the fortune of this new league. Ballantyne printed, Constable published, and Scott wrote, the most popular books that had ever been seen. Abbotsford was soon built, and through its hospitable doors defiled at one time or another all the famous of the day, — not more welcome than a host of less distinguished guests. No man was ever so sociable and so busy as Scott, and by his rule of early work, he had each fine day at his disposition from noon onwards, to seek pleasure and give pleasure in the company of his family, his friends, his guests, and his innumerable dogs. This lasted for ten years. In 1825 the crash came. Scott had left business affairs to his partners; the Ballantynes and Constable had speculated, not in books only; there was a deficit of nearly half a million, and Scott, jointly with the Ballantynes, was responsible for £140,000.

He met the blow with strong stoicism, though his whole nature writhed under parting from what had grown into his heart: his trees, above all. It was open to him to dispose of his library and household furniture, and the life-rent of his estate; and to defray his personal creditors, as he could have done in a couple of years. But he refused the relief in bankruptcy to which he was entitled, and agreed to make over to his creditors the asset which law could not touch — the whole proceeds of his brain. The arrangement, once made, was a relief to him. "I see before me a long, tedious, and dark path, but it leads to true fame and stainless reputation," he wrote. "If I die in the harrows, as is

very likely, I shall die with honour; if I achieve my task, I shall have the thanks of all concerned, and the approbation of my own conscience." He did die in the harrows — seven years later — having cleared off nearly ninety thousand pounds of debt; twenty thousand more came by insurance; and five years later the claims were settled in full.

It was a stupendous achievement, and a glorious; but at a tragic cost. Within these seven years the strong worker slaved himself to death, hacked his genius out of being. It is Daudet's story of the man with the brain of gold. Scott, too, reached the days — the days of "Count Robert of Paris," when of the miraculous treasure nothing was left but a few scraps clinging to the walls of the hollow skull; and he, too, was seen in the world's market, stupid and dazed, holding out a hand all bloody, with scrapings of gold on the finger-nails — till death's mercy delivered him.

It was not one trouble that came on him, but hundreds; his wife's death in the very recoil of the first shock, while he could not even be at her side; then sickness besetting him, and the succeeding pillage that the years made upon his strength; sorrows for his grandchildren, sorrows for his friends, loneliness where there had been such merry company, gloom where all had been so gay; and above all the growing dread, not of death, to die handsomely and there an end, but of Swift's end, Marlborough's end — of protracted dotage. Even this came, but it came mercifully during those last days in Italy, whither the nation sent him, as a nation's hero should be sent, in one of its ships of war. It was the gentle delusion of his dotage that the task was accomplished, the debts paid, "and he might have dogs as big and as many as he pleased." He was brought home to Abbotsford to die, and

there he passed away amid loving tendance, leaving the world the poorer for his absence, yet rich with a heritage the like of which no man since Milton had left behind him.

Scott was above and before all a born story-teller. He was no dramatist, though he had as much as any who ever lived the genius for dramatic narrative. But he had also a beautiful lyric gift, and again and again his narrative is elevated and transfigured by the lyric blending of thought and emotion in a single phrase. Strangely enough, this is seen more often in his novels than in the lays. His mind, essentially uncritical, accepted much of the prevailing conventions in poetry, and though he departed from Pope's tradition in his choice of subject and of metre, and in the whole temper of his work, yet his style in sustained narrative is coloured by the eighteenth-century canons, so fatal to lyric simplicity.

What we find in Scott the poet, then, is above all the genius for narrative, which revived the art of Chaucer — extinct for centuries in England — but gave it a new application. The finish and beauty, line by line, which Chaucer attained, which in Scott's own day Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley all attained, were not sought after by Scott. Poor and trivial verse is common in his poems ; he had made up his mind (to apply his own criticism of Dryden)

> That pointed and nicely turned lines, sedulous study, and long and repeated correction and revision would all be dispensed with, provided their place was supplied by rapidity of conception, and readiness of expressing every idea without losing anything by the way — perpetual animation and elasticity, and language never laboured, never loitering, never, in Dryden's own phrase, "cursedly confined."

Such was his theory, as it was also Byron's, and a mistaken theory it is. Poetry to please for long

must please continually and continuously by its style; and only perhaps in one point of metrical technique is Scott a distinguished artist — that is, in his use of proper names. A splendid example will be found in the fourth canto of *The Lord of the Isles*, where the minstrel follows the voyage of Lord Ronald's galley, rousing the clans from loch to loch, headland to headland, till the sonorous list closes with:

> Scarba's isle, whose tortured shore
> Still rings to Corrievreken's roar,
> And lonely Colonsay.

Nevertheless, it would be ill done to depreciate these poems. The magic of such an opening as that in *The Lady of the Lake* — sure sign of a genius for narrative — must always charm; the free and bounding step of the verse atones for a legion of shortcomings; and the description of all that Scott loved so well will never cease to be a delight to those who, like himself, look on moor and sea-loch, mountain and river, with an eye that associates with such scenes the pleasures of sport, pleasures of clean rain and sunshine, storm and calm. For the beauty of nature Scott had no mystic's feeling: it touched him with the simplest of joys, the commonest exhilaration. What distinguished and differentiated his pleasure in Scotland's scenery was his ever-present sense of the past in the present, his power to re-people the landscape with the bygone inhabitants. Nor that only. He had in no common measure a poet's human sympathy, and above all, for the simplest human interests of his own land.

The part of Scott's poetry which is imperishable consists in his lyrics, and here, like Burns, he is clear of the eighteenth-century tradition and fully possessed of the simpler and more elemental utter-

ance. His lyrics are, like Shakespeare's, the utterance of a great and happy nature pouring itself into song as the birds do for the mere love of singing, with hardly more appeal to thought. Most of them sing with a martial beat, like *Waken Lords and Ladies Gay*; some have the skirl of the pipes, like *Pibroch of Donal Dhu*; some the Highland keene, like *The Coronach* ("He is gone on the Mountain"); and some, like *Brignall Banks* or *Proud Maisie*, and Madge Wildfire's snatches and catches, "dally with the innocence of love like the old time."

Many of the best are in this way scattered through the novels. Here is a verse given to 'Daft Davie Gellatley' in *Waverley*.

False love, and hast thou play'd me this
In summer among the flowers?
I will repay thee back again
In winter among the showers.
Unless again, again, my love,
Unless you turn again;
As you with other maidens rove,
I'll smile on other men.

One may quote also, as equally characteristic, the ringing ballad which was written one day in the very thick of his troubles, to fit an old tune that sang in his head while he was riding:

To the Lords of Convention 'twas Claver'se who spoke,
"Ere the King's crown shall fall there are crowns to be broke;
So let each Cavalier who loves honour and me,
Come follow the bonnet of Bonny Dundee.

Come fill up my cup, come fill up my can,
Come saddle your horses, and call up your men;
Come open the West Port, and let me gang free,
And it's room for the bonnets of Bonny Dundee!"

Dundee he is mounted, he rides up the street,
The bells are rung backward, the drums they are beat;
But the Provost, douce man, said, "Just e'en let him be,
The Gude Town is weel quit of that Deil of Dundee."

As he rode down the sanctified bends of the Bow,
Ilk carline was flyting and shaking her pow;
But the young plants of grace they look'd couthie and slee,
Thinking, Luck to thy bonnet, thou Bonny Dundee!

With sour-featured Whigs the Grassmarket was cramm'd
As if half the West had set tryst to be hang'd:
There was spite in each look, there was fear in each ee,
As they watch'd for the Bonnets of Bonny Dundee.

These cowls of Kilmarnock had spits and had spears,
And lang-hafted gullies to kill Cavaliers;
But they shrunk to close-heads, and the causeway was free,
At the toss of the bonnet of Bonny Dundee.

He spurr'd to the foot of the proud Castle rock,
And with the gay Gordon he gallantly spoke;
"Let Mons Meg and her marrows speak twa words or three,
For the love of the bonnet of Bonny Dundee."

The Gordon demands of him which way he goes —
"Where'er shall direct me the shade of Montrose!
Your Grace in short space shall hear tidings of me,
Or that low lies the bonnet of Bonny Dundee.

"There are hills beyond Pentland, and lands beyond Forth,
If there's lords in the Lowlands, there's chiefs in the North;
There are wild Duniewassals three thousand times three,
Will cry *hoigh!* for the bonnet of Bonny Dundee.

"There's brass on the target of barken'd bull-hide;
There's steel in the scabbard that dangles beside;
The brass shall be burnish'd, the steel shall flash free,
At a toss of the bonnet of Bonny Dundee.

"Away to the hills, to the caves, to the rocks —
Ere I own an usurper, I'll couch with the fox;
And tremble, false Whigs, in the midst of your glee,
You have not seen the last of my bonnet and me!"

He waved his proud hand, and the trumpets were blown,
The kettle-drums clash'd, and the horsemen rode on,
Till on Ravelston's cliffs and on Clermiston's lee,
Died away the wild war-notes of Bonny Dundee.

Come fill up my cup, come fill up my can,
Come saddle the horses and call up the men,
Come open your gates, and let me gae free,
For it's up with the bonnets of Bonny Dundee!

Everywhere in Scott's lyric verse one feels two influences: the influence of Scotch vernacular poetry, the ballads and songs which he had been all his life collecting; and the influence of Shakespeare, with scraps and allusions from whose work every chapter of prose that Scott ever penned is set like a mosaic (most of all in the *Journal*, where he altered for solace his own private thoughts). And it may be said boldly that Scott in his novels is, of all writers, the most Shakespearian.

A strange limitation has to be noted, which probably gives the reason why many who really enjoy literature do not enjoy the *Waverley* novels. Scott's power of characterisation almost invariably deserts him with his heroes and heroines. They are blameless young men and young women, whose behaviour is so admirably correct as to be wholly uninteresting. One exception is to be found in *The Fair Maid of Perth*, where the hero is a coward—a most unsuccessful experiment. Another more important is in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, where the Master of Ravenswood is a truly tragic figure, and Lucy really lives. But Scott wrote, or dictated, this book in the delirium of illness, and it is different in character from all the rest. It differs chiefly in this, that the central figure is also the main actor: and heaven knows what strange lineaments of Scott himself, emerging from the black days of his failure in love, may be stamped on the tragic hero. But almost everywhere else the gallant good-looking youth and the ringletted young lady are puppets pushed about in a hurly-burly of people all rich in the sap of life. The true pivot of the *Antiquary* is Edie Ochiltree, the old gaberlunzie; of *Guy Mannering*, the randy gipsy witch, Meg Merrilies. In *The Heart of Midlothian* another exception must be made, for

here was a heroine, Jeanie Deans, whom Scott felt himself authorised to treat without the genteel convention. She is a heroine seen with the same eye of humorous understanding which sets before us impartially kings and beggars — James of England, grotesque on the throne, Elspeth Mucklebackit, tragic and sinister in a fisher's cottage; which is undismayed before Louis XI. of France, before Cromwell, before Claverhouse, but drops in disorder before the amiable young gentleman and young lady, fearing an indiscretion.

Here and there a heroine is forced by circumstances into the possession of character, and Flora Mac-Ivor in *Waverley* is a good instance. Yet it is neither Flora nor Fergus who reveals to us the spirit of the Highlands; it is the bare-legged retainer, Evan Dhu Maccombich, when we see him in Court:

> Fergus, as the presiding judge was putting on the fatal cap of judgment, placed his own bonnet upon his head, regarded him with a steadfast and stern look, and replied in a firm voice: "I cannot let this numerous audience suppose that to such an appeal I have no answer to make. But what I have to say you would not bear to hear, for my defence would be your condemnation. Proceed, then, in the name of God, to do what is permitted to you. Yesterday and the day before you have condemned loyal and honourable blood to be poured forth like water. Spare not mine. Were that of all my ancestors in my veins, I would have perilled it in this quarrel." He resumed his seat, and refused again to rise.
>
> Even Maccombich looked at him with great earnestness, and, rising up, seemed anxious to speak; but the confusion of the court and the perplexity arising from thinking in a language different from that in which he was to express himself, kept him silent. There was a murmur of compassion among the spectators, from the idea that the poor fellow intended to plead the influence of his superior as an excuse for his crime. The judge commanded silence, and encouraged Evan to proceed.
>
> "I was only ganging to say, my lord," said Evan, in what he meant to be an insinuating manner, "that if your excellent

Honour and the honourable court would let Vich Ian Vohr go free just this once, and let him gae back to France, and no to trouble King George's government again, that ony six o' the very best of his clan will be willing to be justified in his stead; and if you'll just let me gae down to Glennaquoich, I'll fetch them up to ye mysell, to head or hang, and you may begin wi' me the very first man."

Notwithstanding the solemnity of the occasion, a sort of laugh was heard in the court at the extraordinary nature of the proposal. The judge checked this indecency, and Evan, looking sternly around, when the murmur abated, "If the Saxon gentlemen are laughing," he said, "because a poor man such as me thinks my life, or the life of six of my degree, is worth that of Vich Ian Vohr, it's like enough they may be very right; but if they laugh because they think I would not keep my word and come back to redeem him, I can tell them they ken neither the heart of a Hielandman, nor the honour of a gentleman."

The criticism of Scott's contemporaries upon his work was that he had "made a discovery in literature" which showed (the *Edinburgh Review* said) how history "might be made available for the purposes of fiction by attention to localities, to manners and costume." And it is certainly no small part of Scott's achievement that he was the first to show outlying tracts of the world and backward ranges of time peopled with living creatures, and not with ethical abstractions like the personages of French tragedy; that he was the first to carry abroad and into the past that noticing eye which makes the present living and significant to all of us. It is true also that the affluence of "local colour" (to use a phrase then brought into vogue), which seemed to his imitators the essential part of his achievement, was really inimitable; for the antiquarian lore which other men read up studiously had been his natural preoccupation, and his lifelong studies, informed by his strong imagination, had impregnated him with the very spirit of mediaevalism. But when Jeffrey said that Scott

had "taught the importance of truth to nature," his observation should have been applied far beyond attention to localities, manners, and costume. The truth which made Scott great was the truth of Shakespeare, not historic accuracy or verisimilitude in accidentals.

This truth Scott never wholly lacks; but the degree to which it is present in his works varies greatly. When he wrote of the Scotch he was thinking far less of the accidentals, those outward marks of character so familiar to him that he rendered them spontaneously, than of the spirit behind the shell. When his object was to create a historical pageant, as in *Ivanhoe*, *The Talisman*, and many others of his most popular romances, there is no denying that the antiquarian in him gets the better of the novelist. The farther he got from the world he knew, the less was the real value of the work; but the novelist or poet, though often submerged beneath a mass of costume and archaeological detail, is always prone to reappear. His Brian de Bois Guilbert and the rest are at one time stuffed creatures of pasteboard, at another come suddenly to life and breathe the very breath of battle. When he works with fuller historical knowledge, as in *Quentin Durward*, with all the mine of the old French chroniclers to draw on, we reach a wonderfully vivid presentment; and yet nothing else in *Quentin* is quite so good as the old Scot, Ludovic le Balafré. Coming nearer still, as in *Woodstock*, we find the unfailing narrator's gift backed by a rare knowledge; he reads the English Puritans in the light of the Scotch Covenanters. And yet, put the types side by side, Sir Henry Lee of Woodstock by the baron of Bradwardine, Nehemiah Holdenough by the preachers in *Old Mortality*, the fanatic Harrison beside the fanatic Burleigh,

and it appears at once how much more affluent in life is the Scotch creation. It is by such novels as *The Antiquary*, *Old Mortality*, *Guy Mannering*, *Waverley*, and *The Heart of Midlothian* that Scott really stands to be judged. And to think over the list of characters which these books contain is to realise how wide a world we jostle in under Scott's leading: Dandie Dinmont, Claverhouse, old Lady Marjorie of Tillietudlem, Meg Merrilies, Glossin the lawyer, Davie Deans and his daughters — but it is needless to extend the suggestion. Only, it should be noted that in Scott the power of characterisation is equally yoked with the narrative gift which keeps the attention riveted from chapter to chapter, yet never oversteps the modesty of nature. No novelist relies so little as Scott on the stimulation of sex interest: no man deals less in morbid psychology. He has his limitations, doubtless. But wherever we follow him we are conscious of the sane health-giving presence of a strong and honourable man, acquainted with the infinite variety of life, its knavery as well as its honour; who inculcates on the whole a humorous philosophy, but is always quick to show us dignity even in the ludicrous (as in the courage of old Mause Headrigg), and who is, above all, a lover of chivalry and courage, whether they reside in Claverhouse or in Dandie.

CHAPTER XVII

BYRON

THE two great literatures of Europe in the eighteenth century, as in the seventeenth, were those of France and England. In the eighteenth century, as in the latter part of the seventeenth, English literature was largely affected by the great French writers, above all by Voltaire and Rousseau: while, conversely, these writers themselves derived much of their inspiration from the example of English political freedom. With the period inaugurated by Burns — the period of the French Revolution and its consequences — the parts changed. England had the great writers, and French poets and novelists for the first time were proud to copy the northern barbarians; while the strongest impetus given to English writers came from the spectacle of what was doing in France.

This generalisation does not apply fully to Scott, who was a Tory in blood and bone; an antiquarian can scarcely be a reformer. But Scott's influence was felt in France, and bore rich fruit, though he did not live to see it, in the prose of Hugo, of Mérimée, and of the elder Dumas. And where Scott entered he paved the way for Shakespeare.

More sudden and more direct was the impact of Scott's younger contemporary, Byron, who leapt at once into the greatest fame that a living English writer has ever enjoyed outside the English-speaking communities. If posterity, indeed, "commences at the frontier," then Byron's rank was fixed for all time before he was thirty. But his transcendent popularity at home was followed, as often happens, by a period of obscuration, from which his true stature only of late begins to emerge. And, upon the whole, posterity seems to have modified very little the contemporary verdict.

As with Scott, so with Byron, pedigree is important. His remote ancestors were among the Conqueror's knights, a fact which we find duly noted in *Don Juan*. But he did not lack progenitors of a nearer significance. Byron's immediate predecessor in the title killed in a desperate duel without seconds his neighbour and kinsman, Mr. Chaworth, and incurred a verdict of manslaughter. The rest of his life he passed in a kind of lunatic isolation, earning for himself the title of "The Wicked Lord." His brother, grandfather to the poet, was the notable admiral, "Foulweather Jack," of whom Byron writes, "he had no rest on sea, nor I on shore," and whose "Narrative" supplied the poet with many hints for the shipwreck canto in *Don Juan*. The poet's father was a soldier, whose veins held the same fierce and stormy blood; and "Mad Jack," as he was called, married a Highland lady, Miss Catherine Gordon, with a temper as wild as his own. Byron was their only child; but his father had previously been married, and had by this union a daughter, Augusta, the half-sister whose love and devotion Byron never tires of celebrating.

Thus sprung of a stock passionate and reckless

even to insanity, he was reared by a woman who varied transports of fury with hysterical tenderness. And he was born lame. Deformity in strong natures is almost always accompanied by violent ambition, as if to obliterate nature's stigma, and Byron had all the sensitiveness and the ambition of the type. At ten years old, in 1798, when he succeeded to the title and an embarrassed property, he was taken to Newstead Abbey, the ancestral seat of his family, which he has described again and again. At twelve he was sent to Harrow, and thence to Cambridge, where he proved no more amenable to discipline than was to be expected. But he had read enormously, and while still an undergraduate published his immature collection of verse, *Hours of Idleness*. The *Edinburgh Review* selected the volume for slashing review, and undoubtedly the "perfect Timon, not nineteen," if only by this description of himself, invited attack. But if he did, he could hit back, and the literary satire, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, published in 1809, at once earned a vogue. Crude judgments have seldom been so forcibly expressed as by this youth of one-and-twenty: it is to the credit of all concerned that close friendship was afterwards cemented by him with men whom his boyish petulance had affronted — chief of all with Scott.

In the meantime he had taken his seat in the House of Lords, had held high revel at Newstead with Cambridge companions (dissipations luridly depicted in the first canto of *Childe Harold*), and now, in June, 1809, he set out for foreign travel, shipping for Lisbon. The next two years were passed in those wanderings of which he kept an account in the long descriptive poem ultimately to be known as the first two cantos of *Childe Harold*.

But an episode of his boyhood left too deep a trace on his emotions to be omitted in any narrative which should help to understand his work. The representative and heiress of the family, whose head "the Wicked Lord" had killed, was Mary Chaworth, a beautiful girl two years older than the poet. Living at Annesley, near to Newstead, she met him, and a boy and girl intimacy sprang up, which in Byron's tropical nature soon ripened into passion. In his sixteenth year he spent his whole summer holidays with her, in the next summer they met, when she was engaged. The whole story is told in *The Dream*, as characteristic a poem as ever Byron wrote, and it was written twelve years after the parting, and a year after his own marriage. Yet fiction is blended with the truth, for there is no reason to believe that any such fate befell Mary Chaworth in marriage as is assigned to her in the stanzas which I omit — quoting those only which seem obviously to describe remembered emotions :

A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.
There was an ancient mansion, and before
Its walls there was a steed caparison'd :
Within an antique Oratory stood
The Boy of whom I spake ; — he was alone,
And pale, and pacing to and fro : anon
He sate him down, and seized a pen, and traced
Words which I could not guess of ; then he lean'd
His bow'd head on his hands, and shook as 'twere
With a convulsion — then arose again,
And with his teeth and quivering hands did tear
What he had written, but he shed no tears.
And he did calm himself, and fix his brow
Into a kind of quiet : as he paused,
The Lady of his love re-entered there ;
She was serene and smiling then, and yet
She knew she was by him beloved, — she knew,
For quickly comes such knowledge, that his heart
Was darken'd with her shadow, and she saw
That he was wretched, but she saw not all.

He rose, and with a cold and gentle grasp
He took her hand; a moment o'er his face
A tablet of unutterable thoughts
Was traced, and then it faded, as it came;
He dropp'd the hand he held, and with slow steps
Retired, but not as bidding her adieu,
For they did part with mutual smiles: he pass'd
From out the massy gate of that old Hall,
And mounting on his steed he went his way;
And ne'er repass'd that hoary threshold more.

* * * * *

A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.
The Wanderer was return'd. — I saw him stand
Before an Altar — with a gentle bride;
Her face was fair, but was not that which made
The Starlight of his Boyhood; — as he stood
Even at the altar, o'er his brow there came
The self-same aspect, and the quivering shock
That in the antique Oratory shook
His bosom in its solitude; and then —
As in that hour — a moment o'er his face
The tablet of unutterable thoughts
Was traced, — and then it faded as it came,
And he stood calm and quiet, and he spoke
The fitting vows, but heard not his own words,
And all things reel'd around him; he could see
Not that which was, nor that which should have been —
But the old mansion, and the accustom'd hall,
And the remember'd chambers, and the place,
The day, the hour, the sunshine, and the shade,
All things pertaining to that place and hour,
And her who was his destiny, — came back
And thrust themselves between him and the light:
What business had they there at such a time?

In the seven years intervening between Byron's departure on his Eastern wanderings, here referred to, and 1816, when the lines were written in Switzerland, surprising vicissitudes had befallen him. He had traversed much of Portugal and Spain (still in the grip of France), had voyaged about the Mediterranean, visiting many scenes of classic memory, and contracting that affection for

the Greek race which never left him; had seen with anger the marbles dragged by Lord Elgin from the Acropolis to fill lugubrious aisles in the British Museum; had visited Constantinople, and swum the Hellespont (for, lame though he was, Byron was athletic, and devoted to violent exercise); and, returning to Greece, had spent nearly a year wandering through the country. And at last, in July, 1811, he reached London and proposed to return to Newstead, but his mother's sudden death anticipated their meeting. Early in the following year, the cantos of *Childe Harold*, composed during his wanderings, appeared, and outdid the success even of Scott's *Lay*. The young peer, whose beauty was worthy of his talent, was lionised as perhaps no other man has been; and in the next two years he poured his dazzling succession of metrical romances, whose "local colour" was borrowed from the regions of Childe Harold's Mediterranean pilgrimage. All the contrast of Moslem and Christian, all the fierceness of their internecine wars, all the fire of southern passions, was set out with a kind of volcanic energy; and through all the poems loomed the typical "Byronic" figure, the man with the pale brow, the fatal smile, the creature of mysterious fascination. *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, *The Siege of Corinth*, and *Parisina* (the most remarkable of the group), all written at break-neck speed, were bought up with even more surprising rapidity. They may be called flashy, and they are; but there is no denying their power in depicting a narrow range of emotions. The verse which Byron employed in them was that used with such magic by Coleridge in his *Christabel*, the rhyming couplet whose length is regulated by accent, not by syllabic measure; and Byron had none of Coleridge's exquisite music. But the rhythm

answers his call, as a horse the spur and bridle, and moves with a gallant jingling. It is needless to quote from things so well known ; and in these poems we have only a part of Byron, only his rhetorical power and his heat of passion.

Needless also to dwell on the other side of his activity at this time. He drew women like a magnet ; but in an evil hour he married one between whom and himself there was little mutual attraction. Miss Millbank had money, good looks, and a talent for the mathematics ; she had no talent for forgiveness, and there was none which a wife for Byron so much needed. They lived together without apparent discord till the birth of his daughter Ada ; five weeks after this, Lady Byron left her husband, without warning him of her intention, and refused to return. The causes for her action were never stated, though Byron repeatedly, and at long intervals, demanded a reason. But the blank thus left was filled up by society and the world with every fertility of invention. The poet's "Satanic" pose was now construed in the largest sense of wickedness ; and before the torrent of obloquy Byron retired, leaving England for the last time in April, 1816.

The numerous poems in which he parades his domestic woes are, for all their power, sufficiently lamentable reading. "The moral Clytemnestra of thy lord" is too hard a name to throw at any woman. But Lady Byron was no ignorant girl when she married, and she ought not to have undertaken such a duty only to shrink from it. Moreover, her obdurate silence was the deadliest method of attack. It is impossible not to regret that the memoirs left by Byron to Moore, as his literary executor, should have been destroyed by the consent of Moore and the publisher, John

Murray. Nothing can be so unedifying as the gap left for indecent conjecture.[1]

The catastrophe certainly embittered and blackened Byron's mind, but it did not impair his genius. Travelling through the Netherlands he visited the field of Waterloo, where the corn grew rank ; thence by way of the Rhine he reached Switzerland, and settled on Lake Leman, close by the other famous poet-outlaw, Shelley. So began a famous literary friendship ; and it should always be remembered that Scott and Shelley, men alike in nothing but their greatness, admired and honoured Byron as the greatest intellect of their day. Later in the year Byron made his way higher into the mountains, and saw all the panorama of cloud, snow-peak, avalanche, cliff, and pine forest, against which he has set the witch-drama of *Manfred*, written in this year. From the same time dates the *Prisoner of Chillon*, perhaps the best of his narrative romances, and the third canto of *Childe Harold*, containing his wonderful description of Waterloo, together with his impressions of the famous Lake, where he and Shelley added new literary associations to a scene already made illustrious by "Voltaire, Rousseau, our Gibbon, and De Stael."

The fourth and last canto treats of Italy, whither he emigrated in the autumn with his friend Hobhouse. After a stay in Verona he settled in Venice, a city of whose beauty and pleasures he drank deep. Thence he went to Rome ; thither he returned from Rome ; and there he was when the later cantos of *Childe Harold* were published, differing by a world from their predecessors.

[1] Moore cannot be blamed in the matter, for his judgment was hampered by the fact that he stood to gain £2,000 if the memoirs were published ; and his first care was naturally to secure his own honour.

The affectation of Spenserian phraseology had dropped off before the first canto was complete; and Byron, always a master of rhyme, wrote the better for a metre whose laws corrected the defects of his own ear. From the first he used this complicated verse with mastery; but now in this mature production the lines flow naturally as speech. Verse like the description of the famous ball at Brussels or of the Roman Coliseum has been classed as rhetoric; with thus much of justice that it gains by good recitation, for Byron's poetry has few inner beauties; its effect is immediate, like that of oratory. But it would be indeed a narrow definition of poetry which should deny the title to work like this. It is, however, not like Shelley's or Wordsworth's, the utterance as if of one singing to himself; an audience is always addressed, and to Byron's mind the first merit of verse was directness and lucidity. No one can ever doubt his meaning; the thought is clear cut and detached, as that of Pope and Dryden, whom he defended boldly against the Wordsworthians. But to their force and clarity he added a glamour and a sense of beauty which sets him in a region far beyond their range.

Yet Byron had not attained his full expression. The metrical romances — of which the last, *Mazeppa*, was written at Venice after his return from Rome — showed one aspect of him, characteristically presented in that whirling narrative of the mad ride. The serious, contemplative, and declamatory verse of *Childe Harold* (in the later cantos) showed another; and another yet, foreshadowed in *Manfred*, reached its utmost limit in *Cain*, incomparably the finest of his dramatic writings. But when all is said and done, there is only one voice in Byron; and that destroys the effect of his attempts in drama proper,

Marino Faliero, *Sardanapalus*, and *The Deformed Transformed*. With *Manfred*, and still more with *Cain*, the case is different. We have undoubtedly in them drama like that of the *Prometheus Vinctus* — the drama of a single figure at war with its surroundings, in revolt against the world. In a limited sense, few things are more dramatic than the moment when Cain finds himself standing over the first slain. The drama lies not in his collision with Abel, but in the action and reaction of his own soul.

But, upon the whole, the character of Byron's genius only reveals itself fully through the medium which he discovered when he set to work in Venice to write the tale of *Beppo* in the eight-line stanza, which was familiar to Byron in Italian, but whose adaptation to English verse had been shown by his friend, J. H. Frere, in *Whistlecraft*. Then at last Byron came into full possession of his style, ranging easily from tragedy to comedy, from solemnity to broad laughter, yet maintaining indescribably a unity of tone — the unity, indeed, that is felt when a brilliant talker discourses at length on a variety of subjects. Byron was, by the consent of Scott and Shelley, the most wonderful of companions. "He is cheerful, frank, and witty," wrote Shelley. "His more serious conversation is a sort of intoxication; men are held by it as by a spell." And this spell — the whole magic of a personality — is let loose when Byron begins to use a verse form admitting of all the transitions of mood which fascinated and bewildered those about him.

In *Beppo* we have only a tale after the manner of Boccaccio, inimitably told, but lacking the power and elevation of which Byron was capable. But about the same time *Don Juan* was begun. Its progress was retarded by a new influence in Byron's

life — the Countess Guiccioli, a beautiful Italian lady, who finally left her husband to live with the poet, and whose devotion was repaid by a fidelity of which Byron's life afforded no other example. The tie lifted him out of his gross dissipations at Venice, and he went to live with her at Ravenna. But her serious disposition was revolted by the levity and cynicism of *Don Juan*, and she urged new work in the graver vein. The result was the series of dramas culminating in *Cain*. Against her, however, was ranged the opinion of Shelley, who had previously visited Byron at Venice and now stayed with him and the countess at Ravenna, and by her request induced Byron to migrate to Pisa. "He has read to me," says Shelley, "one of the unpublished cantos of *Don Juan*. It sets him not only above, but far above, all the poets of the day. Every word has the stamp of immortality."

To this was added the stimulus of an attack. The first cantos of *Don Juan*, published in 1819, open with a violent onslaught upon Southey, who, recoiling in middle life from the Jacobinism of his nonage, had become a prop of the Tory *Quarterly Review* and (by Scott's refusal of the office) poet laureate. In 1821 Southey published his *Vision of Judgment*, a composition in hexameters describing the canonisation of George III. in heaven. To this preposterous production was prefixed a denunciation of Byron as chief of the "Satanic School":

> Men of diseased hearts and depraved imaginations who, forming a system of opinions to suit their own unhappy course of conduct, have rebelled against the holiest ordinances of human society, and, hating that revealed religion which, with all their efforts and bravadoes, they are unable entirely to disbelieve, labour to make others as miserable as themselves by infecting them with a moral virus that eats into the soul.

Byron's first retort was contained in an appendix to the *Two Foscari*, published in a volume of his plays. To this Southey made public answer, and Byron retorted with a challenge which was never delivered. But he had a better weapon than the pistol. He too had written his *Vision of Judgment*, a parody whose least merit is its delightful burlesque of Southey. The poem indeed rises far beyond the occasion, and, being the briefest and completest example of Byron in his most characteristic manner, it shall be described.

There is this first to be said. Southey's charges had a truth in them. *Don Juan* is almost the only piece of really great literature which is likely to deprave. It would be cant to say that it is healthy reading for the sexually impressionable. But if it be a vice to palliate sexual laxity by dwelling on its allurements, it is a more insidious because a more respectable vice to preach and practise intellectual servility; and if Southey had united Byron's genius to the attitude displayed in his *Vision* (which is, however, unthinkable) he would have done more harm than ever Byron did. Moreover, not only Byron's *Vision of Judgment*, but much also in *Don Juan*, is a very healthy corrective to certain vices, and vices to which the English race is particularly prone.

The scene of Byron's *Vision*, then, is laid outside the gate of heaven, where St. Peter sits, idle; few coming his way, there was little turning of the keys, and no work doing.

> The angels all were singing out of tune,
> And hoarse with having little else to do,
> Excepting to wind up the sun and moon,
> Or curb a runaway young star or two,
> Or wild colt of a comet, which too soon
> Broke out of bounds o'er th' ethereal blue,

Splitting some planet with its playful tail,
As boats are sometimes by a wanton whale.

The guardian seraphs had retired on high,
Finding their charges past all care below;
Terrestrial business fill'd nought in the sky
Save the recording angel's black bureau;
Who found, indeed, the facts to multiply
With such rapidity of vice and woe,
That he had stripp'd off both his wings in quills,
And yet was in arrear of human ills.

His business so augmented of late years,
That he was forced, against his will no doubt,
(Just like those cherubs, earthly ministers,)
For some resource to turn himself about,
And claim the help of his celestial peers,
To aid him ere he should be quite worn out
By the increased demand for his remarks:
Six angels and twelve saints were named his clerks.

This was a handsome board — at least for heaven;
And yet they had even then enough to do,
So many conquerors' cars were daily driven,
So many kingdoms fitted up anew;
Each day too slew its thousands six or seven,
Till at the crowning carnage, Waterloo,
They threw their pens down in divine disgust —
The page was so besmear'd with blood and dust.

"This by the way; 'tis not mine to record What angels shrink from," Byron continues. But in the eighth canto of *Don Juan* he has recorded it, in his story of the siege of Ismail; and a stranger compound than this celebration of valour by one who loved it, mingled inextricably with the satirist's detestation of such bloody waste, literature cannot show. The moral is pointed in the stanzas addressed to Wellington which open the ninth canto, and in the not less disrespectful description of the Empress Catherine's emotions on reading the despatch which Juan had the honour of conveying. But here in the *Vision* Byron has other work, and after this brief glance at earth he passes to picture

the death and funeral of George III., whom he sums up thus:

> A better farmer ne'er brush'd dew from lawn,
> A worse king never left a realm undone!

From his picture of the funeral, mingled with thoughts as to what blasphemy may be, and what damnation — bold thoughts, not the less clearly expressed for the cloak of flippancy — Byron returns to the drowsy St. Peter, whom a cherub wakens to announce the king's approach. A colloquy ensues, in which Peter complains angrily of the last king admitted (Louis XVI.), who

> Ne'er would have got into heaven's good graces,
> Had he not flung his head in all our faces.

It must be allowed that Byron treats St. Peter with scanty reverence; but he wrote in the south, where folks take a more personal interest in the saints, and pasquinade them, like kings or consuls. For other powers he has a less familiar treatment.

> While thus they spake, the angelic caravan,
> Arriving like a rush of mighty wind,
> Cleaving the fields of space, as doth the swan
> Some silver stream (say Ganges, Nile, or Inde,
> Or Thames, or Tweed), and 'midst them an old man
> With an old soul, and both extremely blind,
> Halted before the gate, and in his shroud
> Seated their fellow traveller on a cloud.
>
> But bringing up the rear of this bright host
> A Spirit of a different aspect waved
> His wings, like thunder-clouds above some coast
> Whose barren beach with frequent wrecks is paved;
> His brow was like the deep when tempest-toss'd;
> Fierce and unfathomable thoughts engraved
> Eternal wrath on his immortal face,
> And *where* he gazed a gloom pervaded space.
>
> As he drew near, he gazed upon the gate
> Ne'er to be enter'd more by him or Sin,
> With such a glance of supernatural hate,
> As made Saint Peter wish himself within;

He potter'd with his keys at a great rate,
And sweated through his apostolic skin:
Of course his perspiration was but ichor,
Or some such other spiritual liquor.

From this swift transition to the comic the verse recovers no less swiftly to describe how heaven's gate opened

And the flashing of its hinges
Flung over space an universal hue
Of many-colour'd flame.

From it issued Satan's equal and antagonist,

A beautiful and mighty Thing of Light,

the archangel Michael. Honourably the two chiefs, "his Darkness and his Brightness," greeted each other; Michael more kindly, but Satan

With more hauteur, as might an old Castilian
Poor noble meet a mushroom rich civilian.

The business opened, Satan claims the king for himself; and in trenchant stanzas states his plea for the damnation of one who, though "a tool from first to last," still deserves a tool's fate.

He ever warr'd with freedom and the free:
Nations as men, home subjects, foreign foes,
So they that utter'd the word "Liberty!"
Found George the Third their first opponent.

His pleading concludes with a dexterous reminder to St. Peter of Catholic Ireland's servitude; but the Saint's undignified resentment is interrupted by Michael, who demands testimony. And it comes — "a cloud of witnesses," appearing first "Upon the verge of space, about the size Of half-a-crown," but soon discerned to be as numerous as locusts. Michael protests against the superfluity, and a spokesman is demanded. Who shall it be?

Then Satan answer'd, "There are many;
But you may choose Jack Wilkes as well as any."

A merry, cock-eyed, curious-looking sprite
Upon the instant started from the throng,
Dress'd in a fashion now forgotten quite;
For all the fashions of the flesh stick long
By people in the next world; where unite
All the costumes since Adam's, right or wrong,
From Eve's fig-leaf down to the petticoat,
Almost as scanty, of days less remote.

The spirit look'd around upon the crowds
Assembled, and exclaim'd, "My friends of all
The spheres, we shall catch cold amongst these clouds;
So let's to business: why this general call?
If those are freeholders I see in shrouds,
And 'tis for an election that they bawl,
Behold a candidate with unturn'd coat!
Saint Peter, may I count upon your vote?"

"Sir," replied Michael, "you mistake; these things
Are of a former life, and what we do
Above is more august; to judge of kings
Is the tribunal met: so now you know."
"Then I presume those gentlemen with wings,"
Said Wilkes, "are cherubs; and that soul below
Looks much like George the Third, but to my mind
A good deal older — Bless me! is he blind?"

"He is what you behold him, and his doom
Depends upon his deeds," the Angel said;
"If you have ought to arraign in him, the tomb
Gives license to the humblest beggar's head
To lift itself against the loftiest." — "Some,"
Said Wilkes, "don't wait to see them laid in lead,
For such a liberty — and I, for one,
Have told them what I thought beneath the sun."

"*Above* the sun repeat, then, what thou hast
To urge against him," said the Archangel. "Why,"
Replied the spirit, "since old scores are past,
Must I turn evidence? In faith, not I.
Besides, I beat him hollow at the last,
With all his Lords and Commons: in the sky
I don't like ripping up old stories, since
His conduct was but natural in a prince."

And so, in short, declining to blame George for the things on whose account Bute and Grafton "were

both damn'd long ago," Wilkes "votes his *habeas corpus* into heaven." Satan protests in anger, and then summons another witness. "Call Junius!"

> The shadow came — a tall, thin, grey-hair'd figure,
> That look'd as it had been a shade on earth;
> Quick in its motions, with an air of vigour,
> But nought to mark its breeding or its birth;
> Now it wax'd little, then again grew bigger,
> With now an air of gloom, or savage mirth;
> But as you gazed upon its features, they
> Changed every instant — to *what*, none could say.

Upon this ingenious hint Byron enlarges for several stanzas, before "the mighty shadow of a shade," questioned of his name, replies:

> If I have kept my secret half an age,
> I scarce shall tell it now.

And to Michael, urging that perhaps the pamphlets had been too bitter, written in passion's heat:

> "Passion!" cried the phantom dim,
> "I loved my country, and I hated him."

> "What I have written, I have written: let
> The rest be on his head or mine!" So spoke
> Old "Nominis Umbra"; and while speaking yet,
> Away he melted in celestial smoke.

Thus the two sides are dramatically stated, and Byron is free to attack his purpose, which, though ostensibly primary, has really very slight importance, but still is not to be left out. And in plunges the devil, Asmodeus, lugging no spirit but a mortal — seized among the English Lakes — who is, of course, no other than Southey. Before the new witness can be heard, Asmodeus explains to Michael how this creature

> Anticipates
> The very business you are now upon,
> And scribbles as if head clerk to the Fates.

Michael commands a hearing; but at the first creak of Southey's "spavined dactyls" the audience is dismayed. Nevertheless he gets his hearing, and sketches his own career:

> He had written praises of a regicide;
> He had written praises of all kings whatever;
> He had written for republics far and wide,
> And then against them bitterer than ever;
> For pantisocracy he once had cried
> Aloud, a scheme less moral than 'twas clever;
> Then grew a hearty anti-jacobin —
> Had turn'd his coat — and would have turn'd his skin.

This is only a sample of the personal satire. But as the speech proceeds, Southey draws out his *Vision*, and, falling to recitation of it, disperses the whole assembly, before St. Peter knocks him into limbo with his keys. So Byron ends:

> As for the rest, to come to the conclusion,
> * * * * * *
> All I saw farther, in the last confusion,
> Was, that King George slipp'd into heaven for one;
> And when the tumult dwindled to a calm,
> I left him practising the hundredth psalm.

Even from these extracts a notion may be gained of the range and supple strength which Byron displayed in this kind of satiric writing. But to complete it, one has to study such descriptions as that of the shipwreck or the siege in *Don Juan*, where tragedy and grim mirth meet in a fashion truly Shakespearian, or as the tragic idyll of Haidée, the Greek pirate's daughter, and her love for the youth whom she finds senseless and half drowned on her island shore.

The supreme merit of *Don Juan*, with its continual transition from earnest to mockery, is that Byron threw such force into his earnestness that

the earnest still seems true, and the flippancy a defensive pose. Hazlitt's criticism that "he hallows in order to desecrate" is not justified, though it applies to those who have followed Byron in his flippancy, without possessing his power to give intensity to the serious aspect of things in their natural doubleness. Yet it is not by *Don Juan*, nor by any of his satires, that Byron most powerfully affected the mind of his own time: it was by those writings of which *Cain* and *Manfred* are perhaps the greatest; which delineate a man somehow set apart, tragically in revolt, sinister yet beautiful, a nobleness predestined to work mischief. The influence, moreover, of large solitudes, the desert, the starlit sky, above all of the mountains, which always soothed and charmed his feverish spirit, is felt in his work constantly in fine passages. But in this he only gave his particular rendering of a passion, which is variously interpreted by Scott, by Wordsworth, and by Shelley, and which marks a changed aspect towards nature — a preference for the wild over the subdued, for primitive earth rather than earth stamped with the character of man.

There is no personality in English literature so hard to judge fairly as Byron's, except Swift's; and, as with Swift, we are embarrassed by the wealth of material. Like Swift, he left copious letters, in which his nature expressed itself with rich fulness; like Swift, he lies open to many censures. A man so great may demand judgment by his peers, and his peers, Scott and Shelley, never speak of him but in charity. The rest of us may be well content to remember always that his death was of the noblest.

He was always, in whatever land, the friend of liberty — though not always of democracy; and he detested to see his country, once the classic

instance of freedom, become the right hand of the Holy Alliance, and binding nations into foreign slavery. The cause of Italy's independence was dear to him, but above all the Greek rising against the Turks fired his spirit ; and in July, 1823, he set out with ammunition and money to join in it. Like many another man, he found that patriotic rebels might be undisciplined scoundrels ; that the men whom he had come to serve seemed little worth serving. But he made generous allowances for vices bred by slavery, and he helped with resolution and with counsel, living hard and working hard in unhealthy conditions. The experience of battle was denied him ; he died of malarial fever in April, 1824, fancying in his delirium that he led men into fight. The last of his verses, written at Missolonghi on his thirty-sixth birthday, may fitly close whatever anyone has to say of Byron :

'Tis time this heart should be unmoved,
Since others it hath ceased to move:
Yet, though I cannot be beloved,
Still let me love!

My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!

The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some volcanic isle;
No torch is kindled at its blaze —
A funeral pile.

The hope, the fear, the jealous care,
The exalted portion of the pain
And power of love, I cannot share,
But wear the chain.

But 'tis not *thus* — and 'tis not *here* —
Such thought should shake my soul, nor *now*,
Where glory decks the hero's bier,
Or binds his brow.

The sword, the banner, and the field,
Glory and Greece, around me see!
The Spartan, borne upon his shield,
Was not more free.

Awake! (not Greece — she *is* awake!)
Awake, my spirit! Think through *whom*
Thy life-blood tracks its parent lake,
And then strike home!

Tread those reviving passions down,
Unworthy manhood! — unto thee
Indifferent should the smile or frown
Of beauty be.

If thou regrett'st thy youth, *why live?*
The land of honourable death
Is here: — up to the field, and give
Away thy breath!

Seek out — less often sought than found —
A soldier's grave, for thee the best;
Then look around, and choose thy ground,
And take thy rest.

A word may be added of his friend and biographer Thomas Moore, who enjoyed while living a fame perhaps beyond his merits, but has since been most unduly depreciated. Few men, if any, of that day did more to restore the singing quality to English verse, and the best of his *Irish Melodies* rank only below the songs of Burns. The long narrative poems, *Lalla Rookh* and the *Loves of the Angels*, oriental in subject, by which he invited comparison with Byron's early work, are fallen into neglect, from which they will scarcely recover. Moore's real importance is, however, not strictly in English literature. He is the founder of an Irish literature in the English tongue as distinct in kind as that which within the same period has grown up in America.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LAKE SCHOOL

However criticism may rank his work relatively to that of his great contemporaries, it seems clear that Wordsworth is the poet who produced most effect not only on poetry, but on the whole thought of the nineteenth century: perhaps because he differed less than the other great ones from the normal standard of Englishmen in gifts of the mind and in ideals of conduct. He was never, like Shelley, a spirit scarcely clad in flesh, fretting against the rules imposed by a world which knows well that most of its members are not moved solely by benevolence; he never possessed securely, like Keats, "the glory of words," the sensuous beauty of phrase; he had none of Byron's meteoric brilliance, none of Scott's narrative power or gathered riches of knowledge; in subtlety and persuasiveness of thought, as in the bewildering magic of romance, his intimate Coleridge far surpassed him. And yet Wordsworth's very limitations were a help rather than a hindrance to one whose avowed purpose was to make poetry out of the commonest wayside experiences of life, and with the language used in the commonest speech of men.

His life, in its external circumstances, can be told in few words. Born in 1770, the son of a land-agent in Cumberland, he passed without distinction from a local school to Cambridge, and from Cambridge into the world. But the world was then in a very unusual ferment, and two visits to France in 1790 and 1791 brought him in touch with revolutionary politicians, with whom he was actually preparing to throw in his lot when his guardians recalled him. He lived on in England without a profession, devoting himself more and more to poetry. In 1795 a bequest of £900 enabled him to set up house with his sister Dorothy in Dorsetshire, till in 1797 he met Coleridge and removed to Somerset to be near the Coleridges at Nether Stowey, where the poets spent together a year momentous for both. *Lyrical Ballads*, published jointly by them in 1798, was the outcome. Then after a winter in Germany, Wordsworth settled with his sister in the Lake country, his birthplace, and the cradle of his imagination: married, and lived there for half a century, in which his genius passed from a storm of contemptuous criticism into the full splendour of fame. He was made Laureate at the death of Southey in 1843, and died in 1850.

But, long though Wordsworth lived, and though he wrote poetry to the end of his days, the essential part of his poetic work is almost entirely comprised in the decade 1797–1807. It is true that *The Excursion* was written later than this and published in 1814 — the only instalment of a great philosophical poem which was to be called *The Recluse*; and *The Excursion* admittedly contains fine passages. But they are smothered in inferior work; and endurance is taxed even by *The Prelude* (completed in 1805, but only published after the poet's death), which, as preliminary to *The Recluse*,

relates at immense length the poet's spiritual history. Matthew Arnold was of opinion that his own Selection comprised all that the ordinary lover of poetry need care to read. But it has been pointed out with great justice by Professor Raleigh that in order to understand Wordsworth fully we must realise how he arrived at his purpose and his conclusions, and that to do so fully we must read *The Prelude*. Nevertheless it may be allowed that for many lovers of poetry this is a counsel of perfection.

The central fact in Wordsworth's life is the tremendous spiritual crisis brought on him by the French Revolution. He went up to Cambridge a youth who half consciously delighted in the face of nature, in the free air of the hills, and the "glad animal movements" of his body among them. But in the impressionable years of youth he was caught by the noble infection of the time, when it seemed that all the buttressed and defended Bastilles of the world, its injustices and anomalies, were going to topple before the wrath of pure Reason. He has described it in imperishable lines :

> Oh! pleasant exercise of hope and joy!
> For mighty were the auxiliars, which then stood
> Upon our side, we who were strong in love!
> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very heaven! Oh! times,
> In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
> Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
> The attraction of a country in Romance!
> When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights
> When most intent on making of herself
> A prime Enchantress — to assist the work,
> Which then was going forward in her name!
> Not favoured spots alone, but the whole earth,
> The beauty wore of promise — that which sets
> (As at some moment might not be unfelt
> Among the bowers of paradise itself)
> The budding rose above the rose full blown.

What temper at the prospect did not wake
To happiness unthought of? The inert
Were roused, and lively natures rapt away!

Elsewhere in *The Prelude* we read of his journey down the Rhone, in 1790, in company with delegates returning from Paris, and the joyous greetings which at every halting place were showered on these

Guests welcome almost as the angels were
To Abraham of old.

He has described also his growing hatred of the evidences of oppression in France, his growing zeal for liberty. But while he was still in the country there came the bloody tale of the September massacres, and in December he returned — or was recalled — to England. Two months later his own country was at war with what still seemed to him the righteous home of Revolution. He has told us in what bitterness of spirit he lived through the days when he could pray only for England's defeat, an alien among his own blood. It was in that ferment of feeling that he found (rather than sought) the inflowing of tranquillity from the heart of nature, among the

Steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.

So he wrote in 1798, the year of his fullest power, revisiting the Wye valley after a lapse of five years, and looking back in gratitude; for, he says:

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,

With tranquil restoration: — feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened: — that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently led us on, —
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

Not less important to an understanding of the poet are the lines which follow later in this, perhaps the most typical of his poems. For with Wordsworth, poetry was not an immediate response to the stimulus of beauty; it was the welling up of feeling long stored in the heart and brooded over, rendering not the detail but the spirit of a landscape. Thus there were in Wordsworth's youth years when his mind was purely receptive: storing up the stuff of poetry which the man in his maturity shaped and set to words:

I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. — That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures.

It is true that in these youthful years he polished and published two volumes of early verse, *The Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, which are in no way distinctive. Of his real poetry, the true Wordsworth, nothing exists that can be confidently dated before 1796, the year in which he began to reap the harvest of nature's silent sowing — a harvest fairly brought home with this poem, the *Lines written near Tintern Abbey*, which closes the first issue of *Lyrical Ballads*. And in them he goes on to describe the mood which succeeded that of mere receptiveness — the "other gifts" which replace the "dizzy raptures" with "abundant recompense":

> For I have learned
> To look on nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
> The still, sad music of humanity,
> Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
> To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
> A lover of the meadows and the woods,
> And mountains; and of all that we behold
> From this green earth; of all the mighty world
> Of eye, and ear, — both what they half create,
> And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
> In nature and the language of the sense,
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul,
> Of all my moral being.

Gradually, as he grew older, the vision faded from him; to the poems which describe this or that scene, this or that simple incident, in a way

to set it in close touch with the all-pervading "sense of something far more deeply interfused," there succeed the great *Ode to Duty* or the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*. In these is a statelier music, a less simple utterance, as befits one who deals with high truths that refuse to be clothed in common words. The poet is writing out, not so much what he has felt and seen, as what he has thought: putting less reliance on the symbol, adding more complex exposition. Now and then, vision returns; but it is a long way from the narrative of *Lucy Gray*, written in 1799, to the *Ode to Duty* in 1805. Yet the most exquisite of all Wordsworth's descriptive poems belongs to the later harvest; the *Solitary Reaper* was a girl seen when he travelled with his wife through the Highlands, and the poem appeared in 1803.

> Will no one tell me what she sings?—
> Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
> For old, unhappy, far-off things,
> And battles long ago.

That stanza shows at its very finest Wordsworth's gift of using the plainest words to spin a web that has all the vibration and all the mystery of a moonlit sky. It is different, not in degree but in kind, from the stately and somewhat academic poetry of his classical narrative, *Laodamia*, written in 1814, or from the austere dignity which he attained at intervals till the end in his voluminous series of sonnets.

There is no poet so difficult to analyse and explain; but one illuminating thing has been said about him by Mr. Raleigh: "He had acquired an art like that of the naturalist, the art of remaining perfectly motionless until the wild and timid creatures of his mind came up about him." His

poetry is spun of emotions so deep and so diffusive — like the joy of lying in sunshine — that they can hardly be focussed into expression. Spectacles of sorrow or of hardship moved him as they move us all, but he watched and waited till the vague pity grew into an articulate speech and revealed itself for what it is — a sense, for instance, of the far-reaching cruelty in human institutions which sends the old man out to fend off starvation by leech gathering on the lonely moor, and of the splendour in the human soul, which can bear with fortitude such a mountain of oppression. He can brood over a simple fact like that of the little child lost in the snow till he shapes it to the tale of *Lucy Gray*, and we, following the parents on their quest, feel the very thrill of terror and of hope as they catch sight of the footprints and track them on to the narrow bridge, where the trail disappears. No story was ever more movingly told; and yet with what genius the poem is brought back at its close to the lyrical note and the pure music of a gentle fancy!

> — Yet some maintain that to this day
> She is a living child;
> That you may see sweet Lucy Gray
> Upon the lonesome wild.
>
> O'er rough and smooth she trips along,
> And never looks behind;
> And sings a solitary song
> That whistles in the wind.

Lucy Gray is perhaps Wordsworth's most perfect success in the type of poem by which he chiefly impressed and in some cases offended contemporary taste. His declared object was to make poetry by narrating the simplest episodes in the simplest terms; and of his contributions to *Lyrical Ballads* the majority conformed to this type. Such poems

as *We are Seven*, *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, and *The Idiot Boy* flew straight in the teeth of academic criticism. *Peter Bell*, composed at the same date though not published till long after, is the extreme example, and need not be defended. Nor can it be well denied that in *Goody Blake* both matter and manner fall perilously near puerility. But it is worth while to consider the *Idiot Boy*. This relates merely how an old woman, in order to help her neighbour, not only old but bedridden, sends off her idiot grandson on a pony to fetch a doctor; how the boy goes off, gleeful in the moonlight, and totally forgets his errand; how the two old dames wait and watch, till finally old Betty is plunged into growing despair.

Poor Susan moans, poor Susan groans;
"As sure as there's a moon in heaven,"
Cries Betty, "he'll be back again;
They'll both be here — 'tis almost ten —
Both will be here before eleven."

Poor Susan moans, poor Susan groans;
The clock gives warning for eleven;
"'Tis on the stroke — he must be near,"
Quoth Betty, "and will soon be here,
As sure as there's a moon in heaven."

The clock is on the stroke of twelve,
And Johnny is not yet in sight:
— The moon's in heaven, as Betty sees,
But Betty is not quite at ease;
And Susan has a dreadful night.

That is the kind of verse which moved Jeffrey, not unnaturally, to his snort of "This will never do!" And yet, take the narrative of how old Betty rushes out; in what despair she learns that the doctor has never heard of Johnny; how she seeks over hill and dale till at last by an inspiration she thinks of the waterfall, and there finds the pony standing

quiet and the rider, still in his rapture of idiocy, on his back.

> She looks again — her arms are up —
> She screams — she cannot move for joy;
> She darts as with a torrent's force,
> She almost has o'erturned the Horse,
> And fast she holds her Idiot Boy.
>
> And Johnny burrs, and laughs aloud;
> Whether in cunning or in joy
> I cannot tell; but while he laughs,
> Betty a drunken pleasure quaffs
> To hear again her Idiot Boy.
>
> And now she's at the Pony's tail,
> And now is at the Pony's head, —
> On that side now, and now on this;
> And, almost stifled with her bliss,
> A few sad tears does Betty shed.
>
> She kisses o'er and o'er again
> Him whom she loves, her Idiot Boy;
> She's happy here, is happy there,
> She is uneasy every where;
> Her limbs are all alive with joy.
>
> She pats the Pony, where or when
> She knows not, happy Betty Foy!
> The little Pony glad may be,
> But he is milder far than she,
> You hardly can perceive his joy.
>
> "Oh! Johnny, never mind the Doctor;
> You've done your best, and that is all:"
> She took the reins, when this was said,
> And gently turned the Pony's head
> From the loud waterfall.

The passage loses something when detached: in its context it renders perhaps as much as anything in literature the woman's passion of protecting devotion to the helpless: and for the strength of the emotion one forgives the uncouthnesses of the language. Yet no one but a fanatic would class this poem with a triumph like *Lucy Gray* or pre-

tend that there is anywhere the accent of the poem which describes the half-crazed mother (" Her eyes are wild) " :

> Suck little babe, oh suck again!
> It cools my blood, it cools my brain.
> Thy lips, I feel them, baby! they
> Draw from my heart the pain away.
> * * * * *
> Then happy lie; for blest am I!
> Without me my sweet babe would die.

That is the poetry of simple drama: it can be matched from the Elizabethans, Greene and others. For the lyrical note in Wordsworth, that is all his own and unmistakeable, one would turn rather to such a poem as *The Thorn* and its description of the woman in a scarlet cloak who sits by what may be an infant's grave.

> At all times of the day and night
> This wretched Woman thither goes,
> And she is known to every star
> And every wind that blows.

And the turn of poetic thought which is no less characteristic of him, could not be better exemplified than by the poem which describes Simon Lee, the old and worn-out huntsman, his cottage and his wife, at leisurely length before the poet turns to his theme.

> Few months of life has he in store
> As he to you will tell,
> For still, the more he works, the more
> Do his weak ankles swell.
> My gentle Reader, I perceive
> How patiently you've waited,
> And now I fear that you expect
> Some tale will be related.
>
> O Reader! had you in your mind
> Such stores as silent thought can bring,
> O gentle Reader! you would find
> A tale in every thing.

What more I have to say is short,
And you must kindly take it:
It is no tale; but, should you think,
Perhaps a tale you'll make it.

One summer-day I chanced to see
This old Man doing all he could
To unearth the root of an old tree,
A stump of rotten wood.
The mattock tottered in his hand;
So vain was his endeavour,
That at the root of the old tree
He might have worked for ever.

"You're overtasked, good Simon Lee,
Give me your tool," to him I said;
And at the word right gladly he
Received my proffered aid.
I struck, and with a single blow
The tangled root I severed,
At which the poor old Man so long
And vainly had endeavoured.

The tears into his eyes were brought,
And thanks and praises seemed to run
So fast out of his heart, I thought
They never would have done.
— I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning;
Alas! the gratitude of men
Hath oftener left mourning.

After the days of *Lyrical Ballads* a change begins to show itself. There is first the poem of *Ruth*, again a narrative but in style not less stately than the lines on Tintern Abbey; there is the pastoral idyll, *Michael*, where the same passionate earnestness is felt through the simple narrative, but all attempt at the primitive baldness of style is abandoned; and the leech-gatherer poem, *Resolution and Independence*, is almost the latest of importance which centres round the description of a single personage and incident, treated as a symbol. In *The Affliction of Margaret*, written in 1804, we

come once more, and for the last time, upon the poignant lyric which is the dramatic utterance of a passion. It sounds strange to read that this superb creation had its original in the sorrow of a poor widow living in Penrith who never let a stranger pass without enquiring of him after her absent son. The last stanzas of the tragic self-communing may be quoted:

Perhaps some dungeon hears thee groan,
Maimed, mangled by inhuman men;
Or thou upon a desert thrown
Inheritest the lion's den;
Or hast been summoned to the deep,
Thou, thou and all thy mates, to keep
An incommunicable sleep.

I look for ghosts; but none will force
Their way to me: 'tis falsely said
That there was ever intercourse
Between the living and the dead;
For, surely, then I should have sight
Of him I wait for day and night,
With love and longings infinite.

My apprehensions come in crowds;
I dread the rustling of the grass;
The very shadows of the clouds
Have power to shake me as they pass:
I question things and do not find
One that will answer to my mind;
And all the world appears unkind.

Beyond participation lie
My troubles, and beyond relief:
If any chance to heave a sigh,
They pity me, and not my grief.
Then come to me, my Son, or send
Some tidings that my woes may end;
I have no other earthly friend!

But when the narrative inspiration left Wordsworth, it was for a time replaced by these high and meditative strains, in which many will find his highest achievement. The greatest of his sonnets

(in which he adopted the Miltonic model, and to our judgment by far surpassed his master) were written in 1802; the sonnets to England in the war, that on the extinction of the Venetian Republic, and that composed on Westminster Bridge at dawn, are all of this date. From 1805 date the *Ode to Duty* and the Elegiac Stanzas on a *Picture of Peele Castle* in a thunderstorm, which describe

> That hulk which labours in the deadly swell,
> This rueful sky, this pageantry of fear.

Here indeed we have come far from the manner of the *Idiot Boy*; and in 1806 was completed the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* which, on the whole, probably, popular consent puts above all other poems of its author, if not above all others of his century. It lies open to Arnold's criticism that its basis is fanciful, or at least that the psychological experience of a growing dulness to what is freshest and loveliest in the world is certainly not universal. But there are many lines and passages in it of which it might be said, as has been said of this, that the words "seem to come fresh from God":

> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home.

Later in date than this poem are two of the noblest sonnets, — "Two voices are there" and the other "Call not the royal Swede unfortunate." Yet this latter takes us only to 1809, and beyond that lies a wilderness of verse in which the austere but uninspired beauty of *Laodamia* stands out in lonely relief.

A very small group of poems needs to be men-

tioned apart. In it are the lines to his wife, "She was a phantom of delight." Ruskin has praised with fit eloquence the two lines which say so much so briefly :

> A countenance in which did meet
> Sweet records, promises as sweet.

The others date from an earlier year, 1799, when Wordsworth was in Germany, and there, it seems, saw and loved a girl whose beauty and whose death inspired the poems "Strange fits of passion have I known," "She dwelt among the untrodden ways," "I travelled among unknown men," and finally two lyrics which have something in them that is nowhere else in Wordsworth. The lines "Three years she grew in sun and shower" need hardly be quoted ; yet one may recall perhaps the loveliest verse, where all is perfect :

> The stars of midnight shall be dear
> To her ; and she shall lean her ear
> In many a sacred place
> Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
> And beauty born of murmuring sound
> Shall pass into her face.

But even the magic of that poem is less surprising than its successor. The reader should notice how the sublimest expression of grief may consist in stating what is merely the barest amplification of one phrase, 'She is dead.' But a man needs to command a marvellous dignity of accent to state that as Wordsworth has done in barely a score of simple words, which nevertheless seem to envelope the very globe in the gloom of his sorrow.

> A slumber did my spirit seal ;
> I had no human fears :
> She seemed a thing that could not feel
> The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

These, however, are hardly the qualities by which Wordsworth has left his mark on poetry, for these things cannot be imitated. The moralising poet who has influenced so much subsequent writing is seen in his characteristic speech and mood in such a verse as this from *Expostulation and Reply*:

Nor less I deem that there are Powers
Which of themselves our minds impress;
That we can feed this mind of ours
In a wise passiveness.

The poet who more than any other popularised minute description of landscape is admirably represented by this *Night Piece*, written in 1798, but afterwards wrought into *The Prelude*:

The sky is overcast
With a continuous cloud of texture close,
Heavy and wan, all whitened by the Moon,
Which through that veil is indistinctly seen,
A dull, contracted circle, yielding light
So feebly spread, that not a shadow falls,
Chequering the ground — from rock, plant, tree, or tower.
At length a pleasant instantaneous gleam
Startles the pensive traveller while he treads
His lonesome path, with unobserving eye
Bent earthwards; he looks up — the clouds are split
Asunder, — and above his head he sees
The clear Moon, and the glory of the heavens,
There, in a black-blue vault she sails along,
Followed by multitudes of stars, that, small
And sharp, and bright, along the dark abyss
Drive as she drives; how fast they wheel away,
Yet vanish not! — the wind is in the tree,
But they are silent; — still they roll along
Immeasurably distant; and the vault,
Built round by those white clouds, enormous clouds,
Still deepens its unfathomable depth.

> At length the Vision closes; and the mind,
> Not undisturbed by the delight it feels,
> Which slowly settles into peaceful calm,
> Is left to muse upon the solemn scene.

These passages give us the measure of Wordsworth in a fine moment of the moods which were habitual to him through life. But the inspired Wordsworth rises far beyond these very admirable examples of sententious and descriptive verse. There is no poet in whom inspiration is more evident; there is none in whom it is less constant.

So closely associated with Wordsworth as to be inseparable in a critical examination of their work is Samuel Taylor Coleridge, born 1772, and educated at Christ's Hospital in London, where already his extraordinary talents for discussion revealed themselves.

"Come back into memory, like as thou wert in the dayspring of thy fancies, with hope like a fiery column before thee — the dark pillar not yet turned — Samuel Taylor Coleridge — Logician, Metaphysician, Bard" (so wrote Lamb, his schoolfellow). "How have I seen the casual passer through the Cloisters stand still, entranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the *speech* and the *garb* of the young Mirandula) to hear thee unfold, in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of Iamblichus or Plotinus (for even in these years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts) or reciting Homer in his Greek or Pindar — while the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of the *inspired charity-boy!*"

"Great in his writings, he was greater in his conversation," wrote the same "fifty-years' old friend." Yet though we have Coleridge's published

Table Talk, it does not convey the man to us, or enable us to realise those qualities which made him a focal centre for his generation — for Southey and Lamb most specially, perhaps, and in one momentous year for Wordsworth. Coleridge was, indeed, the only man who influenced Wordsworth's self-isolated nature, and we can perhaps hardly estimate the service he did to literature, or measure the springs which he unsealed in these twelve months at Nether Stowey. But he received in giving: from that period date *Christabel* and *The Ancient Mariner*, which between them make up his own title to fame. Nothing else of Coleridge's, except the fragment *Kubla Khan*, and possibly the two lyrics *Love* and *Youth and Age*, approach this excellence. And of the two masterpieces, preference must be given (only because it is completed) to the marvellous poem which was issued in *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge himself has sketched the joint purpose of this publication:

> It was agreed, he writes, that my endeavour should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us: an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.

Mr. Raleigh has admirably illustrated the contrast by showing that *Peter Bell*, which describes the doom of a cruel tinker who killed a donkey, is Wordsworth's counterpart for Coleridge's tale of

the man who shot the albatross. The contrast, though illustrative, may seem unfair, and of course it is by such a poem as *Ruth* — or even as *Lucy Gray* in all its simplicity — that Wordsworth can afford to be compared with Coleridge in narrative. On such a comparison it will appear that his plain tragedy, drawing the soul out of common incident, is not inferior to the other's wonderful work of embodying visions never seen on earth. But to read *The Ancient Mariner*, noting above all the prose summary which accompanies and illustrates it, is to realise how naturally Wordsworth spoke when he called Coleridge "the most wonderful man I have ever known."

And it should be noted that in many essentials their art was akin. Both could describe the very spirit of nature's phases in a language of the homeliest simplicity ; for example, in Coleridge :

> The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
> It covers but not hides the sky.
> The moon is behind, and at the full;
> And yet she looks both small and dull.

Or again :

> There is not wind enough to twirl
> The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
> That dances as often as dance it can,
> Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
> On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

The last instance has a special interest, for the "one red leaf" was noted in their Somersetshire home by Dorothy Wordsworth, whose quick and delicate perceptions often called her brother's attention to what he enshrined in verse, and, here again, hers were the eyes which saw for another poet.

Both these quotations come from *Christabel*, the

poem by which Coleridge chiefly impressed his contemporaries; and indeed there are few things more impressive than the accumulated hints of some supernatural menace, some devilish witchery, which may be found here. In the famous passage which describes how Christabel led in secretly the fair and distressed lady whose moan had so strangely broken upon her prayer in the forest, stroke after stroke brings nearer the sense of terror, presenting details that seem to hold the very spirit of the scene, till both ear and eye are enlisted to feel the silence, more oppressive because faintly broken, and the darkness, made sinister by one gleam. It culminates in an appeal, not to any definite sense perception, but to the power of stimulated fancy to adumbrate vague horror:

> Beneath the lamp the lady bow'd,
> And slowly roll'd her eyes around;
> Then drawing in her breath aloud
> Like one that shudder'd, she unbound
> The cincture from beneath her breast:
> Her silken robe, and inner vest,
> Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
> Behold! her bosom and half her side——
> A sight to dream of, not to tell!
> O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!

Coleridge had a wonderful gift of suggesting the uncanny: the very essence of it is caught in a stanza of *The Ancient Mariner*:

> Like one that on a lonesome road
> Doth walk in fear and dread,
> And having once turn'd round, walks on,
> And turns no more his head;
> Because he knows, a frightful fiend
> Doth close behind him tread.

But throughout that poem every faculty of genius seems to be at the writer's command, every impres-

sion, whether of beauty or horror, easily in his range: from such a stanza as

> The very deep did rot: O Christ!
> That ever this should be!
> Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
> Upon the slimy sea,

to the lovely description of the sounds which flew about the ship when angel visitants released it from its bondage:

> And now 'twas like all instruments,
> Now like a lonely flute;
> And now it is an angel's song,
> That makes the heavens be mute.
>
> It ceased; yet still the sails made on
> A pleasant noise till noon,
> A noise like of a hidden brook
> In the leafy month of June,
> That to the sleeping woods all night
> Singeth a quiet tune.

The gap between these two poems and the rest of Coleridge's work is not to be measured. Removed from the influence of Wordsworth, or perhaps one should say rather, when the virtue of his youth left him, he sank into the habit of opium taking, and lethargised his great gifts. Both *Christabel* and *The Ancient Mariner* were written before he was thirty: the rest of his work need not concern us.

Yet Coleridge, rather than Wordsworth, was the true centre of the group which came to be known as the Lake School, by reason of the predilection for that country which its members displayed. Wordsworth and Coleridge were its poets, but to them was added Southey, who showed his early spirit of revolt against the eighteenth-century versification by building huge epics in a blank verse that wholly defied all regularity of scansion; and who later settled into a steady conservative,

the writer of a charming *Life of Nelson*, and of the worst among all laureates' poems, his *Vision of Judgment*. The critics of the school were Thomas de Quincey and William Hazlitt, writers of real genius, yet perhaps hardly in the front rank of their time: though the clear, brilliant, incisive style of Hazlitt's critical and descriptive essays will probably ensure them long life, and De Quincey's highly-coloured and decorated prose has never ceased to be popular, at least in one work — *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater*.

But as essayists, and as artists in prose, these men sink into insignificance beside the other member of the school — Charles Lamb.

Lamb had indeed no connection with the Lakes, but the ties between him and Coleridge were, as we have seen, close and life-long. They grew up together, together they versified in youth; and though in poetry Lamb never became a master, he acquired that deep technical knowledge of the art, without which no man is a critic fully equipped. And he soon took his rank as a chief defender of the poetry both of Coleridge and Wordsworth, in whose work he rejoiced — being specially moved by it, as all men are by the work of their contemporaries. The inmost love of his heart was, however, for the older literature of England. Coleridge did much to revive among his countrymen that true sense of Shakespeare's greatness and art which had lapsed — or perhaps hardly ever been attained. But, above all, to Lamb is due the attention increasingly bestowed on the whole Elizabethan literature, whose beauties he made familiar in his *Specimens of the Older English Dramatists*, and emphasised in brief but invaluable sentences of criticism. Nor was that all. His own style took,

like the dyer's hand, the hues of what he worked in, and his prose is coloured with all the richness and the quaintness of early prose, without any loss of that elasticity and freedom which had been acquired in the slow evolution of the literature.

Lamb's writings give us in scattered form the most intimate knowledge of his life and surroundings. Son of a servant to one of the old benchers of the Temple, his youth was spent in those odd half-academic purlieus in the very heart of London. But poverty made it impossible for him to choose literature for a profession, and he was condemned to long drudgery at a desk in the offices of the East India Company. Here, if he came late of mornings, it was his habit to atone (as he said) by going away early ; and his real life went on elsewhere, where he pored over old books, or wrote verses. Then a great tragedy overshadowed his existence : his sister Mary lost her reason, and in a paroxysm of madness killed their mother. The rest of Lamb's life was devoted to the most loving tendance of this sister, and this devotion precluded him from all thought of marriage : though he had already conceived a passion for a girl, "the fair Alice W—n," the memory of which haunted him always, and inspired the beautiful fantasy, *Dream Children : A Reverie* — his vision of the sons and daughters who might have been born to him. But "the children of Alice called Bartram father," and Lamb in truth was unfit for marriage, being himself subject to insanity, and once actually secluded in a madhouse. But he recovered always, as his sister also recovered, and the two lived together the life which is pictured in the *Essays of Elia* — as Lamb's scattered contributions to the *London Magazine* came to be called, from his chosen pen-name. In them Mary Lamb figures as "my cousin Bridget," and

John Lamb the brother as "James Elia." Their characters and habits are only less fully indicated than Lamb's own; for Lamb, like all the greatest essayists, found his material in the stuff of quiet everyday life. His earliest work, *Rosamund Grey*, is a tale, and a tale of horrible outrage — though what lingers in memory is the exquisite beauty of the young girl's tendance on the old blind woman. But narrative was none of his gifts, and the charm of this work lies in its rendering of a personality and an atmosphere; and this he did again and again in a medium that suited his purpose better. Some indication of his method will be found in the following extracts from *Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist.*

"A clear fire, a clean hearth, and the rigour of the game."

This was the celebrated *wish* of old Sarah Battle (now with God), who, next to her devotions, loved a good game at whist. She was none of your lukewarm gamesters, your half-and-half players, who have no objection to take a hand, if you want one to make up a rubber; who affirm that they have no pleasure in winning; that they like to win one game and lose another; that they can while away an hour very agreeably at a card-table, but are indifferent whether they play or no; and will desire an adversary, who has slipt a wrong card, to take it up and play another. These insufferable triflers are the curse of a table. One of these flies will spoil a whole pot. Of such it may be said that they do not play at cards, but only play at playing at them.

Sarah Battle was none of that breed. She detested them, as I do, from her heart and soul, and would not, save upon a striking emergency, willingly seat herself at the same table with them. She loved a thorough-paced partner, a determined enemy. She took, and gave, no concessions. She hated favours. She never made a revoke, nor ever passed it over in her adversary without exacting the utmost forfeiture. She fought a good fight: cut and thrust. She held not her good sword (her cards) "like a dancer." She sate bolt upright; and neither showed you her cards, nor desired to see yours. All people have their blind side — their superstitions, and I have heard her declare, under the rose, that Hearts was her favourite suit.

I never in my life — and I knew Sarah Battle many of the

best years of it — saw her take out her snuff-box when it was her turn to play; or snuff a candle in the middle of a game; or ring for a servant, till it was fairly over. She never introduced, or connived at miscellaneous conversation during its process. As she emphatically observed, cards were cards: and if I ever saw unmingled distaste in her fine last-century countenance, it was at the airs of a young gentleman of a literary turn, who had been with difficulty persuaded to take a hand; and who, in his excess of candour, declared that he thought there was no harm in unbending the mind now and then, after serious studies, in recreations of that kind! She could not bear to have her noble occupation, to which she wound up her faculties, considered in that light. It was her business, her duty, the thing she came into the world to do, — and she did it. She unbent her mind afterwards — over a book.

There we find a good example of Lamb's power of humorous presentment, which is followed by an ingenious passage that displays the essayist at his work of analysing the intellectual constituents of a pleasure; and Lamb's analysis of the graphic instinct in man, which insists upon pictured cards rather than mere numerical symbols, gains a charm from being put dramatically as a reported discussion with this dame. Not less ingenious is the defence of mild gambling in games of mixed skill and chance — for games of pure skill, played for a stake, were to Sarah Battle "a mere system of overreaching." But in games where chance entered, nothing would induce her to play for nothing.

To those puny objectors against cards, as nurturing the bad passions, she would retort that man is a gaming animal. He must be always trying to get the better in something or other: — that this passion can scarcely be more safely expended than upon a game at cards: that cards are a temporary illusion; in truth, a mere drama; for we do but *play* at being mightily concerned where a few idle shillings are at stake, yet during the illusion we *are* as mightily concerned as those whose stake is crowns and kingdoms. They are a sort of dream-fighting; much ado; great battling and little bloodshed; mighty means for disproportioned ends; quite as

diverting and a great deal more innoxious than many of those more serious *games* of life which men play without esteeming them to be such.

And then Lamb turns his hand, and glides easily into his unapproached vein of gentle egoism, touched with the tenderness of a dear affection.

With great deference to the old lady's judgment in these matters, I think I have experienced some moments in my life when playing at cards for *nothing* has even been agreeable. When I am in sickness, or not in the best spirits, I sometimes call for the cards, and play a game at piquet *for love* with my cousin Bridget — Bridget Elia.

I grant there is something sneaking in it; but with a toothache, or a sprained ankle — when you are subdued and humble — you are glad to put up with an inferior spring of action.

There is such a thing in nature, I am convinced, as *sick whist*. —

I grant it is not the highest style of man — I deprecate the manes of Sarah Battle — she lives not, alas! to whom I should apologise. —

At such times, those *terms* which my old friend objected to, come in as something admissible — I love to get a tierce or a quatorze, though they mean nothing. I am subdued to an inferior interest. Those shadows of winning amuse me.

That last game I had with my sweet cousin (I capotted her) — (dare I tell thee, how foolish I am?) — I wished it might have lasted for ever, though we gained nothing, and lost nothing, though it was a mere shade of play: I would be content to go on in that idle folly for ever. The pipkin should be ever boiling, that was to prepare the gentle lenitive to my foot, which Bridget was doomed to apply after the game was over; and, as I do not much relish appliances, there it should ever bubble. Bridget and I should be ever playing.

A student of style will note the exquisite cadence of the close, so unlike the obvious artifice of a rhetorical summing up. It seems to fade away, half baulking the ear, as if it needed a caress to complete it.

The life-long partnership of these two is not commemorated only in the essays: the *Tales from*

Shakespeare, jointly written by the brother and sister, which is still among the best beloved of books, witnesses to their common enjoyment. In addition to the essays we have a great store of Elia's letters, among the best in English. We have the farce *Mr. H.*, which was played and damned — Lamb, it is said, leading the hisses. His love for the stage, testified by many passages in his writings, had not equipped him for success. To his prose must be added a small but exquisite store of verse ; the *Lines to a Stillborn Infant* (in a manner like Marvel's), the verses "When maidens such as Hester die," and above all, the unforgettable, haunting, unrhymed lyric, "I have had playmates, I have had companions," with its refrain of "the old familiar faces."

Lamb's style is hopeless as a model. It created itself to reproduce his whole individuality — the delight in literature which made his work a cento of allusions ; the love of old quaint phrases which bred in him a desire to imitate them ; with these a strong gusto for the physical side of life, its savours and relishes ; but, above all, a pleasure in individual peculiarities which needed marked phrasing to emphasise them. The style is a landmark, however, and represents a reaction against the Johnsonian tradition in prose no less than the diction and metre of the *Ancient Mariner* or *Christabel* shows rebellion against the formal precision of eighteenth-century verse. A desire for colour and variety had been bred by the long-borne tyranny of logic ; and Lamb's prose contained many expressions which Johnson would probably have condemned as overbold even for verse, — for instance the phrase "innocent blacknesses," which he bestows on the obsolete race of boy chimney-sweepers.

CHAPTER XIX

SHELLEY AND KEATS

SHELLEY and Keats will always be thought of together, and not only by reason of the unhappy chance that cut them off, both in Italy, both in the first bloom of their still maturing genius. They are linked together by the circumstance that of all Shelley's longer poems none has quite the same perfection as his threnody for Adonais ; but a connection even more essential lies in the fact that both are the chosen poets of youth. The youthful ferment of ideas finds in Shelley its loveliest expression ; Keats is the poet of youth's mysterious troubling of the senses. One may say that Shelley gave a visionary body to creatures of the mind, even to principles ; while with Keats we find the physical desire for beauty spiritualised into a splendid mystery. And certainly there are not in the history of all literature any two men who present in an extremer form the type of the poetic temperament and character.

Unlike as they were in their origin, they were alike in this, that each was born where a poet seemed the last creature likely to appear — Keats in a livery stable, Shelley in a respectable and wholly commonplace English county family. The only

son of a very rich man, and heir to a baronetcy, Percy Bysshe Shelley had all the obvious pleasures within his reach and cared for none of them. Beautiful as an angel and almost as incongruous in ordinary society, he was sent to school, the appointed place of torment for any eccentric and sensitive lad. At Eton he learnt the classics as if by instinct, but his passion was for dabbling in science, and for literature. He was precocious in writing, but not in talent, for his first books, two romances published before he left school, are worthless. At Oxford he formed a momentous friendship with Thomas Jefferson Hogg, a man of remarkable and most unpoetic talents, who has left us a wonderful picture of the strange and unearthly youth who was so studious yet so irregular, and above all so impassioned in discussion. One may quote the mature opinion of this very cynical and experienced observer.

> In no individual, perhaps, was the moral sense ever more completely developed than in Shelley: in no being was the perception of right and wrong more acute. As his love of intellectual pursuits was vehement and the vigour of his genius almost celestial, so were the purity and sanctity of his life conspicuous.

Yet this very sense of right was destined to lead him into action after action that outraged the moral sense of much less scrupulous persons. A touching faith in the power of the human mind to arrive at accurate conclusions, a noble readiness, in his own case, to act on them, always marked Shelley; and when at the age of nineteen he had convinced himself of *The Necessity of Atheism*, it appeared to him only proper to publish his views in pamphlet form for the benefit of mankind. For this offence he was sent down from the university — where no one seems to have realised that the case demanded

tact rather than severity — and Hogg accompanied him. A quarrel with the poet's father naturally resulted, but Shelley suffered, as always, willingly, for the opinions which he sincerely held ; steadily refusing either to recant them, or to break with Hogg.

While he lived thus in London, kept short of money, he saw constantly his two sisters, who were at school, and with them, one of their friends, Miss Harriet Westbrook, the pretty daughter of an intolerably vulgar family. Shelley, always a propagandist, successfully undertook to convert her to his views, and trouble arose with her parents, when the girl threw herself upon Shelley's protection and proposed that they should fly together. "Gratitude and admiration," he wrote to Hogg, "all demand that I should love her *for ever*." They fled accordingly, and were married at Edinburgh, Shelley waiving his objections to the ceremony of marriage, because to defy convention in this matter meant a greater sacrifice for the woman than for the man.

Such was the entry upon life of this poet, not yet aged twenty. He and his wife settled with Hogg at York, and moved thence to Keswick, where they saw Wordsworth and Southey, neither of them very sympathetic to such a type. But about this time began his correspondence with William Godwin, the author of *Political Justice*, whom Shelley henceforth accepted as a sort of mentor. Political reform was now the first preoccupation of this young regenerator of mankind, and early in 1812 he and his wife crossed to Dublin in order to disseminate personally a pamphlet, his *Address to the Irish People*. In addition to placing copies with the booksellers, the boy and girl (they were really little more) used to stand on the balcony of their lodging and watch till they saw a man who "looked likely" ; then a copy was thrown to him.

Readers of *The Revolt of Islam* will find that the hero pursues methods of propaganda very similar to those which Shelley adopted (ineffectually) in Dublin. The pamphlet advocated, of course, Catholic emancipation, mutual self-help, and many other good things, some of which have come to pass, but all of which then seemed Utopian.

After a few months, Shelley decided that he had done all he could in Ireland, and moved to Wales, where it was his practice to enclose copies of a new manifesto — *A Declaration of Rights* — in bottles, and launch them on the tide, so that perhaps they might reach the right hands. In short, at this time, and perhaps at all, he committed a series of generous absurdities, which must always move to laughter. But it should always be borne in mind that here was a young man with every luxury open to him, who, nevertheless, adhered to a way of life which meant straitened means and every kind of inconvenience ; and who had hampered himself by marriage to a woman neither socially nor intellectually his equal, though she would willingly have become his mistress.

Out of this connection his first grave trouble was to come. In 1813 he moved to London (his first volume of poems, including *Queen Mab*, having been privately published in a small edition), and here he saw a great deal more than he desired of his wife's very intolerable relations, and a great deal of the Godwin household. From one reason or another, his home grew distasteful to him; his wife and he were estranged, and the first stanzas of really fine poetry which he has left are those written in April, 1814 :

Away! the moor is dark beneath the moon.
* * * * *
Away, away! to thy sad and silent home;
Pour bitter tears on its desolated hearth.

In the midst of this unhappiness he made the acquaintance of Godwin's daughter Mary, a beautiful girl of sixteen, and fell for the first time passionately in love. Mary Godwin had been brought up in her father's ideas to regard the shackles of marriage as a social tyranny, destined to be swept away, and she readily accepted the union which the poet offered. They left England together in the summer of 1814 — abandoning Harriet, who was the mother of Shelley's daughter, and soon to be the mother of his son.

The action, although by all common standards reprehensible, was not wrong from Shelley's point of view. He had by marriage secured Harriet from any blame ; he provided for her maintenance. But the opinions which he had publicly expressed in the notes to *Queen Mab* plainly stated that human beings should not be indissolubly bound by law to one another ; and these opinions were formed at a time when he had no inclination to leave Harriet. And if in going away with Mary Godwin his desire coincided with his judgment, it must be allowed that whenever his judgment of right varied from the usage sanctioned by the wisdom of long generations, he acted boldly on his judgment, even though it were to his great disadvantage.

In the course of 1815, money difficulties were arranged with his father, and Shelley was given an income of £1000. He and Mary spent the year wandering through England, and in the course of it the fine blank verse poem *Alastor* was written and published — the first published work of his that gave full proof of genius. "Alastor," "the unforgetting one," Nemesis or Fury, is the Greek name which he gave to the haunting passion that sent a poet wandering through the world in quest of ideal loveliness somewhere incarnate.

In the spring of 1816, soon after the birth of their eldest son, Shelley and Mary went again to Switzerland and settled at Geneva, where they shortly made the acquaintance of Byron, then flying from England before the storm of disrepute. So began the notable friendship between poets who loyally admired and helped each the other. On the lake Shelley had one of his many escapes from drowning — for he could not swim — and showed his habitual lack of fear. During this sojourn on Lake Leman, Mary composed, after a general talk about apparitions, her haunting story *Frankenstein*. A few months later came the news of Harriet's lamentable suicide — for which Shelley can in no way be held responsible, though he went through agonies of self-reproach — and in the end of 1816 the union with Mary was transformed into marriage. The Court of Chancery refused Shelley the custody of his children by Harriet, though he was obliged to pay handsomely for their maintenance. It was a punishment natural enough, but none the less severe ; and it inflicted a long torture of suspense while the law proceedings continued.

The Shelleys were at this time living on the Thames at Marlow, and here was composed *The Revolt of Islam* (originally entitled *Laon and Cythna*). The work is full of Shelley's characteristic blendings of poetry and philosophy, in its description of a great insurrection against tyranny ; of liberty, justice, equality (and vegetarianism), for a moment triumphant ; of the fatal recoil, and the hero's martyrdom. Here also was begun another long poem, *Rosalind and Helen*, even more difficult to read. It was finished in Italy, where Shelley spent the remaining four years of his life, and where he wrote all the poetry by which he is immortal.

The volume of work produced in that brief period is great. It comprises one long poem, *Epipsychidion*, stimulated by his imaginative passion for a beautiful Italian lady who was immured in a convent, and whom he and his wife visited. This poem Shelley himself described as "an idealised history of my life and feelings"— the quest of the perfect love. Yet to most readers it lacks not merely the autobiographic interest, but any interest at all; the mind loses itself, as it is apt to do in Shelley's longer works, among vague and cloudy, though gloriously tinted, shapes. His unfinished *Triumph of Life* is not less obscure. When, however, he attempted drama on the Greek model, the form's austerity compelled him to more definiteness, and in *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas*, his celebrations of the spirit of freedom, which is also the spirit of love, are noble reading. Yet even in these works we value chiefly the lyrics, which lose little if anything by detachment from their setting. His one true drama, *The Cenci*, is based on a story so horrible as hardly to be endured; but since the days of Shakespeare no tragedy at all approaching it had been written.

It is, however, almost entirely by his shorter writings that Shelley holds his place, which is scarcely lower than the highest after Shakespeare and Milton. These poems comprise some of considerable length. *Julian and Maddalo* is a long descriptive record of his visit to Byron at Venice, and it links the description of an excursion upon the Lagunes with the story of a captive seen in a madhouse. *The Witch of Atlas* is a fantastic visionary tale, told in the eight-lined stanza of *Don Juan*. Shorter and far more beautiful, though still of considerable length, are the *Lines written among the Euganean Hills*, which put into an exquisite

seven-syllabled verse the thoughts that arose in Shelley's mind as he looked down upon

> The waveless plain of Lombardy
> Bounded by the vaporous air,
> Islanded by cities fair.

To this list must be added *The Letter to Maria Gisborne*, in which Shelley, writing from Italy, sketched in fluent verse those whom his friends would be meeting in London: Godwin —

> Greater none than he
> Though fallen, and fallen on evil times;

and Coleridge,

> He who sits obscure
> In the exceeding lustre and the pure
> Intense irradiation of a mind
> Which with its own internal lustre blind,
> Flags wearily through darkness and despair —
> A cloud-encircled meteor of the air,
> A hooded eagle among blinking owls.

With these are named Leigh Hunt, Hogg, and one or two more. Much of the same length are the exquisite stanzas suggested by a Sensitive Plant; and one of Shelley's few essays in satire, *The Masque of Anarchy*, with its tremendous opening stanza, on the man who stood for England's part in the Holy Alliance:

> I met Murder on the way,
> He had a mask like Castlereagh,
> Very smooth he looked, yet grim,
> Seven bloodhounds followed him.

Last and by far most beautiful of this group is the *Adonais*, which must be described.

And yet, not even in the *Adonais* is Shelley's most characteristic expression. He is of all poets the most essentially lyrical, the pure fire and air of

song; his verse has the swiftness, the leaping movement of fire, the clearness of ether; there has been no such master of lyrical forms. One need only call up a few of the numbers: "Swiftly walk over the western wave, Spirit of Night," "Music when soft voices die," "On a lover's lips I slept"; or, in statelier rhythms, the wonderful invocation in *Prometheus Unbound*, "Life of Life, thy lips enkindle"; the superb paean in *Hellas*, "The world's great age begins anew"; and above all, the *Ode to the West Wind*. This is Shelley's song to that breath of nature that is Destroyer and Preserver, the wind of autumn, the wind of spring, lord of the powers of the sky, lord of the sea:

> For whose path the Atlantic's level powers
>
> Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
> The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
> The sapless foliage of the ocean know
>
> Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with fear,
> And tremble and despoil themselves:

It is in short an ode to the wind that is the very spirit of the Universe, with which Shelley sought more and more to identify himself in imagination.

That thought is the central motive of *Adonais*. Shelley had met Keats frequently in London at Leigh Hunt's house, and no special sympathy had sprung up between the poets, but when news of the younger man's misfortune reached Shelley, his natural generosity, quickened by the mistaken report that hostile criticism had brought on the illness, led him to write and offer Keats the hospitality of his Italian home. Later, when the news came that Keats had died in Rome, Shelley, in a flame of sympathy and righteous indignation, blended with a premonitory sense that he too was to find an early grave in that foreign land, wrote

the most beautiful of all threnodies, which expresses his brooding thought not only on the fate of Adonais, but on his own destiny. And the finest part of the poem is not in the opening cry to Urania, "Most musical of mourners," for her tears upon the loss of this, her "extreme hope, the loveliest and the last"; nor yet the picturing of those spirits that cluster round the corpse:

> The quick Dreams,
> The passion-wingèd ministers of thought,
> Who were his flocks,

and all the rest that Adonais

> Had loved, and moulded into thought
> From shape and hue and odour and sweet sound,

all the train of

> Desires and Adorations;
> Wingèd Persuasions, and veiled Destinies;
> Splendours, and Glooms, and glimmering Incarnations
> Of Hopes and Fears, and twilight Fantasies.

It is not even in the stanzas that describe the young spring's reviving which cannot quicken Adonais; nor in the picture of Urania's coming and of her lament. We reach the true heart of the inspiration in the stanzas that tell of those other poets who mingled their grief over the grave — Byron, Moore, and Shelley himself.

> The Pilgrim of Eternity, whose fame
> Over his living head like heaven is bent,
> An early but enduring monument,
> Came, veiling all the lightnings of his song
> In sorrow. From her wilds Ierne sent
> The sweetest lyrist of her saddest wrong,
> And love taught grief to fall like music from his tongue.

> Midst others of less note came one frail form,
> A phantom among men, companionless
> As the last cloud of an expiring storm,
> Whose thunder is its knell. He, as I guess

Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness
Actaeon-like; and now he fled astray
With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness,
And his own thoughts along that rugged way
Pursued like raging hounds their father and their prey.

A pard-like Spirit beautiful and swift —
A Love in desolation masked — a Power
Girt round with weakness; it can scarce uplift
The weight of the superincumbent hour.
It is a dying lamp, a falling shower,
A breaking billow; — even whilst we speak
Is it not broken? On the withering flower
The killing sun smiles brightly: on a cheek
The life can burn in blood even while the heart may break.

His head was bound with pansies overblown,
And faded violets, white and pied and blue;
And a light spear topped with a cypress-cone,
Round whose rude shaft dark ivy-tresses grew
Yet dripping with the forest's noonday dew
Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart
Shook the weak hand that grasped it. Of that crew
He came the last, neglected and apart;
A herd-abandoned deer struck by the hunter's dart.

All stood aloof, and at his partial moan
Smiled through their tears. Well knew that gentle band
Who in another's fate now wept his own.
As in the accents of an unknown land
He sang new sorrow, sad Urania scanned
The Stranger's mien, and murmured, 'Who art thou?'
He answered not, but with a sudden hand
Made bare his branded and ensanguined brow,
Which was like Cain's or Christ's — oh that it should be so!

A stanza follows, in which Leigh Hunt is added to the group, and then Shelley turns to strike at the supposed cause of this misfortune:

Live thou, whose infamy is not thy fame!

But soon, passing from all thought of these

Carrion-kites that scream below,

the theme changes to the rising triumph of the close, in the thought of those enduring dead, who

last with all the processes of Life which is Nature, Life even in Death :

He has outsoared the shadow of our night.
Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
And that unrest which men miscall delight,
Can touch him not and torture not again.
From the contagion of the world's slow stain
He is secure; and now can never mourn
A heart grown cold, a head grown grey, in vain —
Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,
With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.

He lives, he wakes — 'tis Death is dead, not he;
Mourn not for Adonais. — Thou, young Dawn,
Turn all thy dew to splendour, for from thee
The spirit thou lamentest is not gone!
Ye caverns and ye forests, cease to moan!
Cease, ye faint flowers and fountains! and, thou Air,
Which like a mourning-veil thy scarf hadst thrown
O'er the abandoned Earth, now leave it bare
Even to the joyous stars which smile on its despair!

He is made one with Nature. There is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder to the song of night's sweet bird.
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone, —
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own,
Which wields the world with never-wearied love,
Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.

He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely. He doth bear
His part, while the One Spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
All new successions to the forms they wear;
Torturing the unwilling dross, that checks its flight,
To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;
And bursting in its beauty and its might
From trees and beasts and men into the Heaven's light.

The splendours of the firmament of time
May be eclipsed, but are extinguished not;
Like stars to their appointed height they climb,
And death is a low mist which cannot blot

The brightness it may veil. When lofty thought
Lifts a young heart above its mortal lair,
And love and life contend in it for what
Shall be its earthly doom, the dead live there,
And move like winds of light on dark and stormy air.

The inheritors of unfulfilled renown
Rose from their thrones, built beyond mortal thought
Far in the Unapparent. Chatterton
Rose pale, his solemn agony had not
Yet faded from him: Sidney, as he fought,
And as he fell, and as he lived and loved,
Sublimely mild, a spirit without spot,
Arose; and Lucan, by his death approved;—
Oblivion as they rose shrank like a thing reproved.

And many more, whose names on earth are dark,
But whose transmitted effluence cannot die
So long as fire outlives the parent spark,
Rose, robed in dazzling immortality.
'Thou art become as one of us,' they cry;
'It was for thee yon kingless sphere has long
Swung blind in unascended majesty,
Silent alone amid an Heaven of Song.
Assume thy winged throne, thou Vesper of our throng!'

And in the last stanza of the poem Shelley, with strange prophetic instinct, writes his own doom into one book with that of Keats.

Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my heart?
Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here
They have departed; thou shouldst now depart.
A light is passed from the revolving year,
And man and woman; and what still is dear
Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.
The soft sky smiles, the low wind whispers near:
'Tis Adonais calls! Oh hasten thither!
No more let Life divide what Death can join together.

That light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which, through the web of being blindly wove

By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given.
The massy earth and spherèd skies are riven!
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar!
Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

Keats died on the 27th December, 1820; a year and a half later, in July, 1822, Shelley was drowned off Leghorn. His body, washed ashore on the sand, was burned, with Byron and Trelawney assisting; the ashes were interred in the English cemetery at Rome, near the grave of Keats.

Shelley's poetry, which during his life was received by the public with absolute indifference, and by the reviewers with contempt, has never affected the mind of Europe as did that of Byron, being of all poetry, perhaps, the most untranslatable, so indissoluble in such lyrics are thought and words. But for English readers it soon came to rank with what is finest in Wordsworth; and for those who love best what may be called the aerial qualities of the imagination, the swift and varied music of rhythms that answer to every change of passion, and the glory of words that seem to have all the colours of the rainbow, Shelley has no equal among the lyric poets of his country.

We pass now from the writer of *Adonais* to its subject. John Keats was born in 1795, and died just after he had completed his twenty-fifth year. His mother was the daughter of a prosperous livery

stable keeper, who married her father's head groom. At school he had the good fortune to make friends with the son of his schoolmaster, Charles Cowden Clarke, afterwards author of the *Shakespearian Concordance*. The friendship was maintained after Keats was taken from his education to be bound apprentice to a surgeon at Edmonton, near London. But the boy was already a devouring reader, with a passionate interest in the classical mythology. While still a boy he made a translation of the *Aeneid* in full, showing that energy which is one of the first essentials to high achievement. But he was eighteen before the idea of writing verse himself dawned upon him, and it was the reading of Spenser (lent him by Cowden Clarke) that awakened the dormant faculty. He went, in his friend's phrase, "ramping" through this maze of rich mediaeval beauty, so profuse in ornament; and he set to imitating it in Spenserian stanzas of his own, probably those which are preserved.

From Edmonton he transferred himself to London, walked the hospitals, and qualified as a practitioner in his twenty-first year; but medicine had no attractions for him, and the vocation to poetry grew increasingly urgent. The famous sonnet on opening Chapman's *Homer* dates from his hospital days; and a new influence is marked by another sonnet. Leigh Hunt, then noted not only as a fluent and graceful writer, both in prose and verse, but as a journalist active in the cause of liberty, had earned an imprisonment, and Cowden Clarke had been privileged to call on him in jail. Keats handed to his friend the lines *Written on the day that Mr. Leigh Hunt left prison*; and Clarke naturally arranged an introduction of the young poet to the brilliant man of letters, whose narrative poem *Francesca of Rimini*, if it did not serve

as a model to Keats, at least pioneered the way for those who meant, as Keats did, to use the English heroic measure in a manner very different from that of Pope, but akin to that of its great deviser, Geoffrey Chaucer. Mr. Colvin says :

> Under the older system of versification the sentence or period had been allowed to follow its own laws, with a movement untrammelled by that of the metre ; and the beauty of the result depended upon the skill and feeling with which this free element of the pattern was made to play about and interweave itself with the fixed element, the flow and divisions of the sentence now crossing and now coinciding with those of the metre, the sense now drawing attention to the rhyme and now withholding it.
>
> Chaucer's conception of the measure prevails throughout the Elizabethan age, but not exclusively or uniformly. Some poets are more inobservant of the metrical division than he, and keep the movement of their periods as independent of it as possible; closing a sentence anywhere rather than with the close of the couplet, and making use constantly of the *enjambement*, or way of letting the sense flow over from one line to another, without pause or emphasis on the rhyme-word. Others show an opposite tendency, especially in epigrammatic or sententious passages, to clip their sentences to the pattern of the metre, fitting single propositions into single lines or couplets, and letting the stress fall regularly on the rhyme. This principle gradually gained ground during the seventeenth century, as every one knows, and prevails strongly in the work of Dryden. But Dryden has two methods which he freely employs for varying the monotony of his couplets : in serious narrative or didactic verse, the use of the triplet and the Alexandrine, and in lively colloquial verse the use, not uncommon also with the Elizabethans, of dissyllabic rhymes.
>
> In the hands of Pope, the poetical legislator of the following century, these expedients are discarded, and the fixed and purely metrical element in the design is suffered to regulate and control the other element entirely. The sentence-structure loses its freedom : and periods and clauses, instead of being allowed to develop themselves at their ease, are compelled mechanically to coincide with and repeat the metrical divisions of the verse.

Hunt proposed to return to Dryden's example,

aiming, as Mr. Colvin says, at adding "a familiar beauty of style to variety of movement in this metre"; but his taste often bewrayed him. Yet he led the way which Shelley followed in *Julian and Maddalo* and the *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, which Keats essayed in *Endymion*, and which has subsequently been trodden by many, most notably perhaps by William Morris.

The earliest experiments of Keats in this metre were his rhymed Epistles to various friends, which have the same relation to his later work as an artist's academy studies. And the first volume of his *Poems*, published in 1817, contained nothing of more than tentative achievement except the sonnet on Chapman. But the lines named *Sleep and Poetry* contained the young writer's formulation of a revolutionary creed in poetry, like the utterance with which Wordsworth prefaced the *Lyrical Ballads*. It is a spirited denunciation of the school

> That swayed about upon a rocking horse
> And thought it Pegasus.
>
> * * * * *
>
> Their verses tallied. Easy was the task.
> A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask
> Of Poesy.

And so, with a bold challenge to the "poor, decrepit standard,"

> Masked with most flimsy mottoes, and in large
> The name of one Boileau,

the young fighter took his plunge; and, as usually happens, took it unnoticed. But Leigh Hunt was already the mark for Tory lampoons, and to be associated with Hunt was to incur hostility. And when, in 1818, *Endymion* was published, *Blackwood* and the *Quarterly* vented their anger in articles which have left a lasting stain on their credit.

Endymion displayed, as Keats himself said in his touching preface, "great experience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished"; its imagination is clouded, as he saw and said, with the ferment of the stage that lies between boyhood and manhood. But no critic had a right to ignore the beauty which is only too profuse in its pages. Keats tells the old Greek story of the moon goddess and her love for the Cretan youth, but tells it with amplifications, some discovered in Drayton — one of the Elizabethan authors whom he had studied so closely — and more that are simply of his own devising. Throughout it we are sated and cloyed with his "exquisite sense of the luxurious"; we are estranged by a note of voluptuous effeminacy; and it is perhaps only in the two lyrics set in it, the *Hymn to Pan* of the first book, and the Lady's Chant of the fourth, that we find Keats possessed of his full inspiration. Here is a stanza from the latter:

> "Whence came ye, jolly Satyrs! Whence came ye!
> So many, and so many, and such glee?
> Why have ye left your forest haunts, why left
> Your nuts in oak-tree cleft?" —
> "For wine, for wine we left our kernel tree;
> For wine we left our heath, and yellow brooms,
> And cold mushrooms;
> For wine we follow Bacchus through the earth;
> Great God of breathless cups and chirping mirth! —
> Come hither, lady fair, and joined be,
> To our mad minstrelsy!"

Note the sensuous descriptiveness of his "cold mushrooms." But finer still and more mature in style is this strophe of the *Ode to Pan*:

> O Hearkener to the loud clapping shears,
> While ever and anon to his shorn peers
> A ram goes bleating: Winder of the horn,
> When snouted wild-boars routing tender corn

> Anger our huntsman: Breather round our farms,
> To keep off mildews, and all weather harms:
> Strange ministrant of undescribed sounds,
> That come a-swooning over hollow grounds,
> And wither drearily on barren moors:
> Dread opener of the mysterious doors
> Leading to universal knowledge — see,
> Great son of Dryope,
> The many that are come to pay their vows
> With leaves about their brows!

There we have the artist who was to reach his full expression in the great Odes — wielding a manner which is strongly coloured by the Elizabethans in such a line as

> Strange ministrant of undescribed sounds,

yet is made entirely his own. And this is the poet whom Lockhart or some other in *Blackwood* ordered "back to the shop — to plasters, pills, ointment boxes, etc." Keats doubtless felt the blow, but it is clear from his letters that it never seriously affected him. He was indeed busy with a graver trouble, for his brother had fallen into a rapid consumption. The danger of infection was not then realised; yet had it been, Keats, with a hereditary predisposition marked by his mother's early death from the same disease, would probably still have done as he did, and tended his dying brother by night and day till the end came. And then, with the seeds of the evil already doubtless sown in him, worse mischief yet followed: he fell in love with all the passion of his ultra-sensuous temperament, and the woman whom he loved had no answering passion for him. The last two years of his life were tormented with keen physical jealousy and hopeless desire; for though Miss Brawne had consented to an engagement, there could be little prospect of marriage; and when in February, 1820, Keats coughed up blood, and, with his trained eye, recognised in its colour

a death-warrant, there was written the end to more than his hopes of life and fame.

Fame was secured to him, however, for in a few weeks after this first attack of the wasting illness, his third volume appeared, containing all the work by which he is really to be judged (except the wonderful ballad, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, which, though written, he did not publish). The volume opened with *Lamia*, a tale of mediaeval colour and romance interest, but laid (like Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*) in ancient Greece; its metre is, like that of *Endymion*, the heroic couplet. This was followed by two other romances in verse, mediaeval Italian in subject, mediaeval English in feeling and ornament.

Isabella, or the Pot of Basil, is perhaps the one of Keats's longer poems by which he can be most fully understood. Hardly even Shakespeare has conveyed the tremulous beauty of dawning love in maiden natures more exquisitely than do the first stanzas, which tell how Isabella and Lorenzo, the young servant of Isabella's grasping brothers, met, looked, languished, and at last spoke and attained their felicity. Yet this rendering of such eagerness and such swooning rapture was only what Keats had done before, though not with such discreet selection of ornament. A surer mark of maturing genius is seen in the verses that describe the means by which Isabella's brothers were enriched :

> For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,
> And went all naked to the hungry shark;
> For them his ears gush'd blood; for them in death
> The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark
> Lay full of darts; for them alone did seethe
> A thousand men in troubles wide and dark:
> Half ignorant, they turned an easy wheel,
> That set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel.

That stanza shows at once the poet's power to realise in flesh and blood the human significance of

a universal process; and in the closing couplet is a noble instance of the wisdom, the more than natural insight, by which the truly great see and make us see into the very heart of things. Literature has no finer image. And yet, so imperfect was still the art of this self-educated youth that in the next stanza he tumbles to the very verge of bathos.

Only for a moment, however. When the brothers have spied out the wooer's secret, when they have taken their cruel resolve, we are in the full tide of dramatic narrative, in which the artist achieves marvellous strokes of suggestion, as in the bold expression

> So the two brothers *and their murdered man*
> Rode past fair Florence.

We are not told the details of Lorenzo's slaying; the strength of the poem is reserved to concentrate upon the passage where, after months of watching and waiting, his lady, vision-guided, seeks out his forest grave and on it

> Began
> To dig more fervently than misers can.

The rest of the tale — her burying, poor crazed soul, the dissevered head in a pot under a plant of basil that grows green and leafy from such feeding; her cherishing the pot till suspicion was aroused and her brothers stole it, and searched, to find there what they recognised too well, and what dogged them into exile; and the ceaseless lamentation of the girl now twice bereaved:

> O cruelty,
> To steal my basil pot away from me; —

all this is kept at the highest level of narrative poetry.

Even more rich in visual beauty, perhaps, though less dramatic, is the poem, *St. Agnes' Eve*, which

tells how Porphyro came to the chamber of his lady and passed for her premeditated vision ; and how, when wakening came, he bore her silently away from the house of his enemies past the drowsy porter into the wild night. It is the one poem in which Keats uses the Spenserian stanza, and nowhere is his technical mastery more apparent. The description of Madeline's unrobing while the moonlight streams through panes of stained glass in the mullioned window

> Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes
> As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings,

can only be matched by the picture of her

> Azure-lidded sleep
> In blanchèd linen, smooth, and lavendered.

And yet in the fragment of *Hyperion*, published in the same volume, there was a hint of far greater qualities. Keats, hardly emerged from adolescence, began to write an epic of the *Titanomachia*, or war in heaven, when Zeus and his younger brood drove out the elder gods. He wrote in blank verse of a dignity which no man since Milton had attained to ; and though the subject overtasked him (as he felt, and abandoned it), the defect lay not in his manner. Mr. Colvin says :

> As to diction and the poetic use of words, Keats shows almost as masterly an instinct as Milton himself ; but while of Milton's diction the characteristic colour is derived from reading and meditation, from an impassioned conversance with the contents of books, the characteristic colour of Keats's diction is rather derived from conversance with nature and with the extreme refinements of physical sensation. He is no match for Milton in a passage of this kind :
>
> Eden stretch'd her line
> From Auran eastward to the royal towers
> Of great Seleucia, built by Grecian kings,
> Or where the sons of Eden long before
> Dwelt in Telassar.

But then neither is Milton a match for Keats in work like this:

> Throughout all the isle
> There was no covert, no retired cave
> Unhaunted by the murmurous noise of waves,
> Though scarcely heard in many a green recess.

Yet here in this book we are not concerned with what might have been. *Hyperion* fails to hold us, even while we admire: one feels vaguely that the subject is not wholly in the artist's grip. What of Keats must be held indispensable to any right knowledge of English literature is comprised in the *Eve of St. Agnes* and *Isabella*; the sonnet on *Chapman's Homer*, and two others, both autobiographic (the first expressing his youthful scorn of a great yet undefined task weighing on him, "When I have fears lest I should cease to be"; the second, that exquisite last verse of love, written on his way to Italy where he died, "Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art"); the ballad, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, with one or two lesser lyrics; and above and before all the three odes, *To a Nightingale*, *On a Grecian Urn*, and *To Autumn*. Among these odes criticism can hardly choose; in each of them the whole magic of poetry seems to be contained. The singer is bold in his touch upon words; he disdains none. Autumn conspires with sunshine

> To set budding more,
> And still more, later flowers for the bees,
> Until they think warm days will never cease,
> For Summer has o'er-brimmed *their clammy cells.*

We recognise at once the boldness and the perfect felicity. But his power of evocation is not only to the sense. He seizes upon the imagination with its store of history, and in the simplest and barest phrase presents a whole way of living, as in the

Ode on a Grecian Urn, when he questions : " Who are these coming to the sacrifice ? "

> What little town by river or sea-shore,
> Or mountain built with peaceful citadel,
> Is emptied of its folk this pious morn ?

Or again, as he " listens darkling " to the nightingale, he takes our mind ranging out of the woodland peace into dim and mysterious distances of tumult or of solitude — either of them rising before us at an enchanted phrase :

> Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird !
> No hungry generations tread thee down ;
> The voice I hear this passing night was heard
> In ancient days by emperor and clown :
> Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn ;
> The same that oft-times hath
> Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Thought melts into thought, image into image, with a connection that is of music rather than of logic : the sense is plain, and yet he speaks in a mystery, as is the manner only of the greatest poets.

CHAPTER XX

VICTORIAN LITERATURE

It is not unreasonable to date a new literary epoch from the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign. Keats, Shelley, and Byron had died in the three years ending in 1824. In 1830 Scott had followed ; in 1834 Coleridge and Lamb. Of that mighty generation, Wordsworth alone lived on, and death did not overtake him till 1850. By that date the next rank had arisen, and some were already famous. But chronology is misleading ; we have here to do with a question of affinities and kindred influences. Keats and Carlyle were born in 1795, yet Keats is of Wordsworth's period, Carlyle of Tennyson's. And the writers of that generation, of which Carlyle and Tennyson are perhaps the most conspicuous figures, stand notably nearer us than those of Wordsworth's group. We cannot judge them with the same detachment, and they call for a somewhat different method of discussion. Those among them, however, who appear most distinct and apart from ourselves are the great novelists; for the novel, relying as it does mainly on the charm of narrative and an artistic presentment of character, relies also upon its interest as a social commentary.

It is occupied, that is, with things of permanent interest; it is also occupied with transient fashions. And since small concrete differences of this sort strike the mind strongly, we are conscious of a distance of time between ourselves and the personages of *Pickwick*, *Vanity Fair*, or *Middlemarch*; whereas the early poems of Tennyson or Browning have almost a contemporary appeal. We shall begin, therefore, with the novelists.

Charles Dickens, born in 1812, was the son of a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, and his early recollections connected themselves with the surroundings of Chatham and Rochester, where also he settled in the days of his later life, and where he died. The whole tideway of the Thames plays a great part in his fictions. Before the boy was ten his family had moved to London, and misfortune began to draw in on them, soon driving the elder Dickens to take up his abode in the Marshalsea or debtor's prison, which the son has made immortal in *David Copperfield*. And the wretched history of David's experiences as a small boy sent out to earn his bread in London, living alone in lodgings, is simply a piece of autobiography.

Times mended; the family emerged from their retreat, and Dickens was sent to school for a couple of years, but by the age of seventeen was set to work again, on the business to which his father had taken — that of shorthand reporting. His first original contribution to literature was a comic sketch printed in the *Monthly Magazine*, quickly followed by others, which soon began to be signed *Boz*. In 1836, when the author was only twenty-four, there appeared in two volumes, with drawings by Cruikshank, the *Sketches by Boz*, and Dickens was fairly launched. The publishers, Chapman &

Hall, suggested that he should write a text to accompany illustrations by the comic artist R. Seymour, and the notion of a "Nimrod Club" of ineffectual sportsmen was suggested. Dickens accepted but modified the proposal; and thus also in 1836 began the publication in monthly parts of the *Pickwick Papers*. Long before it was completed Charles Dickens was a household word.

The early sketches had shown a genius for comic situation, and above all, for highly charged and minutely detailed description. *Pickwick* had revealed a master in the fantastic delineation of character; and before *Pickwick* was closed Dickens had turned to the proper vehicle for his talents, the novel, in which all these faculties could be made to subserve the unfolding of a story. *Oliver Twist*, the first of the novels proper, showed the whole man. Here, for the first time, we come on the portrayal of those "dregs of life," the folk outside the pale, who lie in the gutters of every great town; here also is Dickens's characteristic onslaught upon officialdom, as exemplified by Mr. Bumble and all his works; and here especially is the forced, melodramatic, but always moving pathos in his presentment of the weak and appealing figures — Oliver himself and poor Nancy.

The phrase "melodramatic" must always be applied to Dickens, but it may lose in time much of its power to depreciate. An over-indulgence in violent contrasts of good and evil, tenderness and cruelty, was characteristic of the early Victorian period, and it reached its climax of unreality on the stage. And Dickens, who was fully in and of his time, had the passion and the gift for the stage and, above all, for the melodramatic stage. Later in life, when he took to giving readings, he made of his books a kind of theatrical entertainment,

where voice and gesture should supplement and often replace the descriptive phrase ; he was never really content with the printed word, he always wished to have his audience in front of him. And, for an art of this kind, exaggeration is almost essential. Dickens is seeking to give his reader a stage performance without actors ; he must underline again and again the physical contortion, he must heighten the words to replace the melodramatic tragedian's hiss and scowl, or the clown's broad laughter. The strongest proof that in the nineteenth century drama was outworn and obsolete, out of touch with the needs of the time, is the fact that Charles Dickens, a born histrion, wrote not plays but novels.

This point of view governs the whole work of Dickens, which it is impossible to compare with that, for instance, of Miss Austen. For example, no man has excelled Dickens in the description of scenery, if we concede his purpose, which is to present the emotional setting of a scene. Scott will describe you a landscape because he is in love with it, because he wishes you to understand the character of a country ; Dickens is always busy preparing the stage for an action that has to pass, and the tints of the coming action are reflected on to the background. Think of the sinister desolation of those Essex marshes when Pip in *Great Expectations* meets the convict escaped from the hulks. Let us admit, if necessary, that Dickens forces the note, whether in description or in characterisation by dialogue ; if he does, it is just as an actor puts on rouge and grease, because without them in the glare of the footlights his complexion would look unreal. It may be a greater achievement to present persons and things under a natural light, as in their different ways did Scott, Miss Austen,

Thackeray, and George Eliot, than to group them, as Dickens did, for a stage effect secured by an elaborately consistent artificiality. But concede to Dickens the convention which to him was second nature, and we can only sit and wonder at the prodigality of life which he sends defiling before us.

Novel succeeded novel rapidly. *Nicholas Nickleby* was followed by *The Old Curiosity Shop*; and then in *Barnaby Rudge*, a tale of the Gordon Riots, Dickens broke new ground, attempting a historical theme. It is his only venture in this kind save for the unfinished *Tale of Two Cities*, which comes to us completed by the masterly hand of his friend Mr. Wilkie Collins. Then followed the journey to America, which resulted in the very ungracious presentment of that energetic people in certain chapters of *Martin Chuzzlewit*. These sketches, marked with all the crudity of a first impression, are in sharp contrast to that flower of ripened knowledge, who blooms in the same book — the imperishable Mrs. Gamp, a genial creation who lives with a life as full as Shakespeare could have given her. The period of the *Christmas Books* followed, which show Dickens at his most popular and stagiest development. Nowhere else is the expansive optimism which hopes and desires to see all the world happy and contented, eating and drinking copiously, so radiant as in the *Christmas Carol*; nowhere else is there anything so thoroughly unconvincing as the conversion of Scrooge.

From the same period dates a momentary plunge into politics, when Dickens founded and for a few weeks in 1845 edited the Radical *Daily News*. He was essentially an enemy to class distinctions, but in politics proper had neither much competence nor much interest. What really appealed to him was

the business of social reform, and it appealed to his emotions rather than his intelligence; for in spite of Bumbledom it may be allowed that the Poor Law Reform was a wise measure. Dickens, however, had a means of propaganda more effective than the press, and he used it — notably in his attacks on the legal system of England, from the famous trial in *Pickwick* to the tremendous onslaught upon Chancery in *Bleak House*. He had seen a good deal of the law both in its effects, when he lived in the Marshalsea, and in its procedure when he served as a reporter in the courts; and what Dickens saw he never forgot. Of his minor characterisations, among the best are his studies of lawyers and their dependents — only rivalled by those kindlier sketches of strolling players, mountebanks of every description, and all the people of the booths — dwarfs, giants, clowns, or tragedians out at elbow. No one will forget the classical instance in the description of Mr. Vincent Crummles, the "Infant Phenomenon," and all the other friendly Bohemians with whom Nicholas Nickleby enlisted for a moment.

David Copperfield, probably the best of all his books, certainly the fullest of autobiographic interest, was written between 1849 and 1850 — just after Thackeray had, by one sudden leap with *Vanity Fair*, caught up the younger writer, whose fame was already twelve years old. It is needless to enumerate the other novels — of which, perhaps, *Great Expectations* is the most remarkable. Generally speaking, the extravagance of Dickens's earlier work toned down as he matured, the form was less wild, the tone more serious. But life is always seen by him from first to last with a distortion that overcharges every movement and every word. His style, also, is infected with this violence, and it

tends in emotional passages to run into a metric cadence that is neither prose nor verse. It achieves easily the bizarre, the horrible — for instance in such a portrait as that of Rogue Riderhood, the vulturous searcher after tragic flotsam in London's river; it loops and festoons itself about the pretty; but it never attains to the dignity and repose of beauty itself. Loving Dickens is a matter of temperament; but no one who reads him can fail to be interested, at times even spell-bound; no one can choose but to wonder and admire.

William Makepeace Thackeray was a year older than Dickens, but a full decade behind him in fame: nor is it hard to say why. While Dickens was gathering experience in the rude school of necessity, Thackeray, a young gentleman, heir to some considerable property, was enjoying life, first at Charterhouse, then at Cambridge — where he was Tennyson's contemporary — and distinguishing himself by clever caricatures with pen and pencil. In 1832, when Dickens was busy on a paper, he came into his inheritance — some £20,000. Two years later this capital was gone, and Thackeray was emigrating to Paris to study painting. In his twenty-sixth year he applied to Dickens for a commission to illustrate the *Pickwick Papers*; not even yet, though he had done much journalism, did he know his vocation. Soon, however, the offer of definite newspaper employ determined him, the more as he was about to marry; and in 1837 he returned to London. For ten years he worked with increasing brilliancy as a writer of stories, descriptive articles, criticisms — identifying himself chiefly with *Punch*, where his *Snob Papers* appeared. And then at last, in 1847, *Vanity Fair* began to appear. He was ten years later than Dickens, he had

a far less varied experience of life, but his observation was more mature, his mind infinitely more cultivated, his style immeasurably superior. *Vanity Fair* was no experiment; it was the first large canvas painted by a man who had acquired his mastery in smaller ones, such as *The Hoggarty Diamond*. He had indeed written one long piece of fiction, *Barry Lyndon*; yet in so far as the novel is taken to be a love story, *Barry Lyndon* was none, but a satire, couched in the guise of a blackguard's self-complacent autobiography.

Vanity Fair was followed by *Pendennis*, in which Thackeray brought his study of life into a contemporary period. Amelia Sedley had lost her husband at Waterloo, but Arthur Pendennis, we may be very sure, graduated at Cambridge along with William Makepeace Thackeray. The book is not autobiographical, yet it describes doubtless the atmosphere if not the incidents of Thackeray's own nonage. After *Pendennis* came a really wonderful departure. The novelist, now no less famous than his great rival, had given a series of public lectures on *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*, availing himself of his copious knowledge of that period, and in the process augmenting it. He now sat down to write a novel, not only of the days of Queen Anne, but in the language which Addison might have written. *Esmond* is not only a marvellous *tour de force*, it is also a demonstration that in the reign of Queen Anne prose style had obtained its classical development. Thackeray had only to garnish his natural expression with a few obsolete turns of phrase, — to write "'Tis" instead of "It is," — and above all, to avoid obvious modernisms; and his effect was secured. How easily the thing was done is proved by the fact that he dictated the book, and the MS. shows few

corrections. But to write like Clarendon or Milton, a man would have to take much thought and laboriously complicate his periods.

The Newcomes followed, and was completed in 1853. Ten years of life were still left to Thackeray, but save for his delightful *Roundabout Papers* they produced nothing fit to rank with his four great novels, of which *Vanity Fair* and *Esmond* are by far greater than the others, and unquestionably among the dozen or so of the world's masterpieces in this kind.

As in his own day, so ever since, Thackeray stands in opposition to Dickens, and it is difficult not to be a partisan. Both are masters of humour and of pathos, but Thackeray always in the more subdued vein. Contrast Colonel Newcome with Mr. Pickwick and you have one way of envisaging the difference. There is no doubt that Thackeray lies closer to the ordinary experiences of life ; no man could be closer to them, nor freer from the taint of melodrama. He has no faultless monsters, no horrid villains. When he rises to the full height of adventure, when swords clash in the bedroom at Castlewood, one may say that the scene has a nobility of which Dickens can show no example; and in charm of style he is incomparably superior. He cannot, however, approach Dickens in exuberant invention; and perhaps the taste of to-day is unduly afraid of theatricality, and therefore prefers the tamer, safer method. But there can be no question that if we prefer Thackeray to all other novelists we shall prefer a great master. His cynicism is a natural foil to the radiant optimism of his rival; but it is a cynicism always closely allied with tenderness, and his faith in beauty and goodness is never for an instant dimmed.

Of the many women novelists who added to the lustre of the Victorian era, the first to win note was Charlotte Brontë — and a rank no less high than hers has often been claimed for her sister Emily, by virtue of that authoress's one novel, *Wuthering Heights* — a work of almost insane power. Vehemence, if not violence, was the note also of Charlotte Brontë's work, and her first story, *Jane Eyre*, published in 1847, made an extraordinary sensation. Perhaps her lasting fame is more likely to rest upon a later book, *Villette*, sufficiently remarkable for its extremely disillusioned studies of feminine character.

But it appears, at least to the writer of these pages, that the one English woman who can justly be held to rank with the truly great creative artists in prose fiction is Marian Evans, who chose to be known as George Eliot. Beginning in 1857 with the *Scenes of Clerical Life*, she showed a power of observation in familiar life equal to Miss Austen's, joined to a range of tragic passion wholly beyond any that the earlier and more impeccable artist attempted. *Silas Marner*, a longer tale, showed her attempting with equal success a larger canvas; and in *Adam Bede* she produced a long novel which, for its expression of the spirit of rustic English life, has only been equalled by Mr. Thomas Hardy. Its successor, *The Mill on the Floss*, had that peculiar charm which attaches to a novel in which the writer draws upon childhood's experience, and the character of the heroine, Maggie Tulliver, has a large and tragic beauty. Yet the love passages of the close, and Maggie's fluctuations, perplex and somewhat irritate most readers; and for a while at least George Eliot's genius suffered as she attempted to enlarge the scope of her work beyond the midland village.

Felix Holt, a political novel, fell flat. Her excursion into the historical romance, *Romola*, a tale of Italy in the days of Savonarola, resulted in a theme imperfectly vitalised; and the last of her books, *Daniel Deronda*, which deals entirely with the life of rich and rather over-educated people, may be pronounced a failure.

But before she wrote this, she had written *Middlemarch*, a novel of great length, with an astonishing variety of personages — all of them, however, naturally forming part of the society of an English country town. It contains two varying types of the squirearchy, and two, not less strongly differentiated, of the country clergy, with their womenfolk; beneath these, auctioneers, gentlemen farmers, bankers, shopkeepers, and their families, make a living background, against which, and in relation to which, are seen the principal figures, who, though in this environment, are yet not quite of it. These are, Lydgate, an ambitious and able young doctor; Will Ladislaw, a Bohemian, artist and politician by turns; Mr. Casaubon, the scholar rector, a raker-up of obsolete knowledge, yet so full of the scholar's ardour as to captivate the lady who is the central personage of the story. Dorothea Brooke is a woman of large and generous nature, the servant of ideals, deficient in practical sense, and yet, by her power of faith and her understanding heart, able to accomplish not only her own happiness, but at least a reasonable measure of felicity for others. In this novel are three or four figures — Mr. Brooke of Tipton, Dorothea's sister Celia, and the rector, Mr. Cadwallader, and his sharp-tongued wife — who are painted with a skill not unlike that of Miss Austen, though from a very different standpoint. Celia's limitations would have been less unpardonable in that lady's eyes. With

them and beyond them is a world of interests which Miss Austen probably never guessed at. And the more one looks at it the more one must admire the skill which has related Dorothea's hopes and fears to those of Mr. Bulstrode by a nexus that has in it nothing improbable, and linked her through the same tie to the crisis of Lydgate's fortunes — to which she is in a second manner bound by the relations between Ladislaw, her lover, and Lydgate's pretty and shallow young wife. As for Mr. Casaubon, the study of him, of his ambitions and his jealousies, and of Dorothea in relation to him, is simply a relentless masterpiece — yet not so relentless as to recognise no pathos in his failure.

George Eliot's reputation, great in her own day, is now in the period of obscuration which often follows a sudden fame. But it is difficult for anyone who honestly studies this really great book, or the slighter but more attractive work of her earlier years, to doubt of its return to its first splendour. There are many ways in the novel, and hers is the way of copious commentary upon character and action. But the comment is always full of insight, again and again tersely and admirably expressed. Her writing lacks brilliancy, her narrative would admit of condensation; but such power, both of characterisation and construction, informed with so much generous wisdom, must in the end assure to her her place. The artist who sins by giving too much is always finally forgiven if the gift be good enough, and George Eliot's assuredly is.

Side by side with the career of the great novelists ran the course of four great prose writers who were primarily and consciously teachers and propagandists — Macaulay, Newman, Carlyle, and Ruskin. Of these Macaulay's fame was the first to emerge.

Thomas Babington Macaulay, born in 1800, united a prodigious memory to swift and concentrated power of reasoning, enforced by the most obviously telling rhetoric. After a brilliant career at Cambridge he joined the bar, and opened his work as a publicist by an essay on Milton, written in 1825, and published in the *Edinburgh Review*, in which journal most of his long series of essays appeared. In 1830 he entered Parliament, where oratorical successes were added to his other triumphs; in 1834 he went to India as a legal member of Council, and the famous Indian code bears his impress. On his return, seven years more of Parliamentary work divided his attention with literature, till the loss of an election threw him back wholly on his first preoccupation — an event which he has commemorated in admirable and characteristic verse. The last ten years of his life (which ended in 1859) were devoted to his *History of England*, of which he only lived to complete a portion, covering the reign of James II. and almost all the reign of William. It is the longest, most important, and most readable Whig pamphlet ever written.

The establishment in 1802 of the great Whig *Review* marks the full recognition of journalism. From the days when Swift, by anonymous writings, crystallised the convictions, first of England, then of Ireland, the power of the party writer, who would be content to sink his individuality and become merely the mouthpiece of an organisation, had been steadily growing; and the group of young men in Edinburgh who associated themselves with Jeffrey for their leader only carried the principle a step farther. Instead of one nameless personality, there was now a nameless group formed, to mould opinion with a

common purpose and direction. Their effect was so great that it naturally produced rivalry, and for the first half of the nineteenth century the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* were the prime literary forces; until the daily newspaper, growing less and less a mere channel for news, drew to itself much of the same class of talent, and by prompter and more frequent comment surpassed the slow action of the heavier guns. But, whether a man wrote in one of the quarterlies or in a daily paper, he was first and foremost a journalist, that is to say, a partisan; and all Macaulay's work bears on it the stamp of journalism — the characteristics of a group rather than of an individual. Vigorous and virile though his style is, it lacks personality; we look behind it and we find, not a human being, but a political entity. And just by reason of its lack of subtlety, of personal colour, it is of all styles the most subject to imitation. Yet none of those who have caught the trick of shortening down the solid, academic eighteenth-century periods has ever rivalled Macaulay's resources, his wealth of illustration, his power in effective grouping of details so as to present the appearance of irrefragable argument.

Very different and of much nobler fibre were the other giants of English prose in that period; and all of them still lie too near us to be judged. Yet some perfunctory reference must be made to their work, much of which lies far back in the past, though their deaths may be remembered by even the young. John Henry Newman, who lived from 1801 to 1890, gave his life to Oxford till he was past forty. As vicar of St. Mary's, preaching weekly in the great church, he exerted an incalculable influence by his eloquence, which he extended by his writings. *Via Media*, two volumes of sermons, and some of

his verse date from this his Anglican period. In 1841 the publication of *Tract XC.*, a climax to his propaganda of Catholicism within the Anglican community, excited a storm which drove him from his position; and in 1845 he joined the Church of Rome. Most famous of his writings are perhaps his *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, *The Grammar of Assent*, and his poem, *The Dream of Gerontius*. But despite the beauty of this vision, Newman is essentially an artist in prose, and his writings belong by their contents to controversy. What has universal value is his style, of which Canon Beeching has written that, like the atmosphere, it is at once simple and subtle, and allows every subject it touches to display its own proper colour. Its central aim is lucidity, to convey exactly the author's thought; harmony is achieved as a secondary object, and Newman disregards the desire for personal colour, the obvious stamp of a distinctive manner on every line. He is the one prose writer of the nineteenth century who achieves a great manner without the least trace of a mannerism; and the reason is, no doubt, that which he gave himself — that he never wrote for writing's sake, but for the sake of conveying a message. The beauty of his nature informed the whole. Thackeray and Ruskin (in his later manner) have something of the same ease and simplicity, yet the medium with them is not so transparent; they come more than Newman does between the reader and the argument that is uttered or the tale that is told.

A prophet of no Catholic cast was the Scotch peasant Thomas Carlyle, born in 1795, a year before the death of Burns, son of just such another home as gave Burns his birth and breeding. The Carlyles,

with the common ambition of Scotch peasants, bred their clever son for the ministry, and sent him to Edinburgh University, where he distinguished himself in mathematics, and began to study German. The friendship of Edward Irving got him employment as a teacher; it brought him also acquaintance with Miss Jane Welsh, an heiress, a beauty, and a wit. Carlyle was then drifting between literary hack work and tutorship. His earliest published books were translations from the German, and a *Life of Schiller*, and his work may at this period be described as a propaganda of German philosophic thought. In 1826 he made his eventful marriage with Miss Welsh, and carried one of the most clever and high-spirited ladies of her time to drudge for him in a cottage at Craigenputtock. Here, in the loneliness of a Scotch moorland, was written his strange satire, *Sartor Resartus*, in which, for the first time, Carlyle allowed himself to write as he talked, in a language highly coloured by the Biblical phraseology and the writings of Scotch divines. It is the diction of a Scotch peasant, who had read much, prophesying concerning man and the world. The book fell dead in England, but was welcomed by Emerson in America.

In 1834 the Carlyles moved to London, and took up their life-long abode at the house in Cheyne Row, now kept as a national memorial. Here Carlyle worked, endured, and complained for eight and forty years — during thirty-three of which his wife bore with him, not uncomplaining. Recognition came first to the new talent from the few — from Mill, Leigh Hunt, Sterling, and others. Carlyle, refractory to all constraint, laboured on at his self-chosen task, a *History of the French Revolution*, delivered in the manner of prophesying. Its publication brought him at last notoriety, for Carlyle

certainly verified Swift's dictum, that you can be sure of a man of genius when all the dunces are against him. Prosperity was attained by his series of lectures to audiences largely organised by friends; and then followed his essay on *Chartism*, in which Carlyle figured still as a Radical, in so far as his work treated the spirit of revolt. Later came his study of *Cromwell*, which revealed him as the enthusiast for the strong man, and as the apostle of the doctrine preached in *Past and Present*, or in *Latter-day Pamphlets*, that Might is always identical or convertible with Right. This increasing bias of his mind led him to find a congenial subject for his greatest historical work in the making of the Prussian monarchy under *Frederick the Great*. The close of this work set the seal on his fame; but it coincided with the death of his wife, who had been the unceasing helper in all his undertakings. From her death in 1866 onwards he wrote little, only interposing now and then with public utterances to advocate any measure that curtailed liberty. In private matters, however, whether of conduct or belief, he demanded for himself the fullest latitude. Few have practised less what they preached, and no one has spoken so much in praise of silence, with an eloquence only marred by iteration. He had humour without tolerance, a rare combination; but it was not without its companion gift of tenderness. His style, of all others the least proper for imitation, shines by its genius for emphasis. He has a wonderful eye for the salient feature in a scene or a character, a wonderful gift for the word to stamp it in imagination. Infinitely laborious, he achieved astonishing accuracy in his record of facts; but by his presentment of them in violent light and shade, he distorted the truth of their lineaments, as lightning falsifies what it reveals.

His disciple and biographer, James Anthony Froude, wrote a beautiful and luminous English — almost the most perfect written in his day — which seemed the very mirror of truth. Unhappily, he inherited Carlyle's inability to divert himself of bias, and not inheriting his master's laborious accuracy, brought his name into disrepute as a garbler of facts. But by a strange injustice he was principally blamed for the biography of his hero, which gave a presentment of Carlyle, admitting to the full his defects of temper, and yet conveying in addition to a portrait of greatness that sense of something lovable which is hardly to be derived from Carlyle's own writings.

John Ruskin, whose death in 1900, at the age of 87, fitly closes the century, was a disciple also of Carlyle, and like him of Scottish extraction, though very different in the circumstances of his origin. The son of a wealthy wine merchant who had taste enough to be a generous patron of the arts, Ruskin was bred among pictures and artists. Oxford made its full impression on his nature, sensitive to every beauty, and his parents encouraged in all ways their precocious and petted child. While still of schoolboy age he was writing adventurous art criticism, premonitory of the great defence of Turner, which was the central idea of his *Modern Painters*, published at the age of twenty-four. The first volume of that work showed more than a new force in criticism; it showed a new master in prose, who had enriched the language, somewhat impoverished after a century of academic correctness, by a return to its source — the full vocabulary, the rolling periods of the Elizabethans. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice* followed, embodying more and more ethical teaching with the

aesthetic principles. It was first as a lover of the arts that Ruskin was led to feel the meanness of modern standards, the overruling lust for money, which Carlyle denounced unceasingly as a soulless commercialism. But it inspired in Ruskin a positive rather than a negative criticism : his desire through life was to uplift and ennoble the lives of the workers. Carlyle preached the gospel of work, work as a duty ; Ruskin preached the joy in work, the workman's inherent right to the possibility of pleasure in his labour.

Thus arose, out of his work as a propagandist of ideas in art, the revolutionary teaching upon ethics and political economy, which was first shaped in his essays entitled *Unto this Last*. It brought him into collision with the political teachers of an age convinced of the *laissez faire* theory, or, as Ruskin called it, the faith of devil-take-the-hindmost. And from that date — about 1860 onwards — he was a preacher of social utopias, a prophet of revolt yet not of radicalism — in a position of hatred towards the existing order which he himself likened to that of Swift. His writing took generally the form of lectures, and lectures chiefly to young people, among whom his magnetic personality always awakened enthusiasm. His most notable preaching was done as Slade Professor at Oxford, where perhaps the influence of his character and the faith of his life, rather than his system of doctrine, laid the foundations of much that has been constructed since his day. In his second tenure of the professorship, from 1883–6, those who heard him listened to the utterances of a splendid intelligence manifestly deranged, but of a heart no less manifestly sincere and uncorrupted. And the full expression of this, the later Ruskin, is found in his latest publications, *Fors Clavigera*, a series of letters to his Guild of St.

George, and *Praeterita*, a review of his life and memories. Here, as Mr. Harrison has pointed out, you have no longer the master of stately diction, the builder of periods not less artificial than verse ; you have the witty and pregnant speech of an inimitable talker, now solemn, now jesting, but always serious behind mirth, always terse and vivid even when most solemn. The thing which can be most adequately judged about Ruskin — now while his teaching seems to present itself as a chaos of inconsistencies, a mere inarticulate revolt against the tendencies of modern life — is the form in which he clothed his thought ; and one may say confidently that no man has given to English prose a greater range, from the lofty music of passages which have a beauty that is wholly poetical, and yet never degenerate into a stereotyped rhythm, to the supple familiar treatment in plain words of the urgent problems with which human existence tempts and baffles us.

It will be seen, by anyone who considers for a moment, that in the nineteenth century prose took on a wider range. Ruskin and Carlyle, great writers essentially of prose, were nevertheless divided only by a thin edge from the domain of poetry. And it is, therefore, the less surprising that the line of English poets should contract rather than spread after the death of Byron. Nevertheless, poets there were in plenty, and one at least holds his position unchallengeably. It is too early yet to say how posterity will rank Matthew Arnold, whom most of us have read with delight both in his poems and his critical essays. Nor is it perfectly certain that Browning, who has been the poet *par excellence* of the generation now growing up, will survive at all in bulk. No one disputes

the supreme excellence of his work at its best, as for instance in *Men and Women*; but, on the other hand, no one denies the vices of style which make his principal work, *The Ring and the Book*, so difficult of reading. He may vanish from general view, as Donne, a man of very similar qualities and defects, has vanished, or as Cowley vanished half a century later. But Tennyson's place, as a landmark in English literature, is not less assured than that of Pope, and with a brief review of what is so familiar, this book may close.

Alfred Tennyson was born in 1809, son of a country clergyman; and, though not richly come of, was in a position to enjoy a Cambridge career, where his commanding personality attracted to him a troop of admirers from among the best of his generation. From his childhood he had written copiously in verse, and even his early efforts show a notable mastery of form. But his genius matured slowly, and his first volume, published in 1832, lay open at many points to the attack which came in the *Quarterly* from Lockhart. More fortunate than many, Tennyson was able to wait; and ten years went by in which he brooded and polished, till he could give the world a new volume containing much that was new, and much also that was old — for example, *Oenone* and *The Lotos Eaters*, revised and perfected. Perhaps the very best and most characteristic of his work is to be found in such poems as those named, in *Ulysses*, and a number of shorter lyrics. Here also was the *Morte d'Arthur*, foreshadowing the *Idylls*. In 1847 appeared his first long poem, *The Princess*, where magnificent poetry is squandered upon a fantastic and unworthy framework. Yet the poet here approached the position which was to be his — that of interpreting and dignifying

in verse the floating thought of his country. His highest achievement in this kind was reached in 1850, when he published *In Memoriam* — a series or sequence of poems which group themselves round a central lament. Seventeen years before, Arthur Henry Hallam, the poet's closest friend, and the betrothed of his sister, had died in the flower and promise of youth; and round this memory had gathered brooding thoughts on life and death — the desire of immortality, the recoil of doubt, the final triumph, through processes hardly to be expressed in argument, of hope and faith. The work carried Tennyson at once into the foremost place of the religious teachers outside the garb of dogma — the prophet of an age when new discoveries were shaking old beliefs. His marriage followed close on this, the crown of a prosperous and uneventful life; but for a moment, with the publication of his next important volume, *Maud*, came a set-back to his popularity. Unlike everything else in this apostle of self-mastery, it describes the total surrender to passion — first to love, then to anger, last of all to remorse; and there are moments when the note grows shrill. Yet, perhaps, nowhere else is the beauty so luxuriant, the mastery of metre and language so absolute, as in the best parts of this poem. *The Idylls of the King*, which came next, mark at once the climax of his popularity and the decline of his creative power. They were followed (at long intervals, for Tennyson was a deliberate worker) by the series of stately but somewhat uninteresting plays, and in the last twelve years of his life (which ended in 1893) by three more volumes of shorter verse.

There can be no doubt of Tennyson's value for his own age. He had a wonderful gift for saying in noble verse what the more advanced thinkers of

the time were thinking or had thought, and thus he popularised many fruitful ideas. So in *The Princess* he marked admirably the high level of contemporary judgment on woman's claim to an enlarged sphere of freedom ; so in many poems he gave fine utterance to the broad conception of evolution, and again in many others to the Imperialist idea. But the new truth of one age is apt to be the truism of the next, and Tennyson, as a thinker, stands a chance of growing obsolete. Nothing, however, can at any time impair the beauty of such a narrative as *Elaine*, of the lyrical love passages in *Maud*, or of a hundred poems imprinted with that sonorous majesty of utterance which was Tennyson's through more than half a century — from the day of *Ulysses* to the day of *Crossing the Bar*. Even the *Idylls*, where a certain mediocrity of temperament seems to underlie the superb diction, may probably retain their place as masterpieces of style.

They suggest inevitably a parallel with Spenser, by their high-wrought workmanship, their somewhat languid grace, and by that fine sense of the romantic value of landscape which informs them. But, and here is Tennyson's mastery, the Victorian poet constructed no dialect alien from the speech of men ; he wrote an English which became for his own day the standard of poetic diction. And in the *Idylls*, as in all that he wrote, he wielded a verse always harmonious, and wonderfully capable, when he chose, of sense-suggestion. The famous passage in the *Morte d'Arthur*, beginning :

> Dry clashed his harness in the icy caves
> And barren chasms,

is only an extreme instance of his power — perhaps here used in excess — to suggest sound by the ring of words. But, although the Tennysonian blank

verse is that in him which has been most consciously and successfully copied, his greater contribution to the technique of English poetry, by which he must always retain a historic place in the development of his art, can be found only in his lyrical metres — above all in *Maud*. Mr. Coventry Patmore pointed out (in the *Edinburgh Review*) that here an artist had definitely returned to the Anglo-Saxon principle of dividing the verse into bars of equal time-value, which the poet filled up at will, without the obligation to make any type of foot preponderate. "In the greater part of *Maud*," he wrote, "there is really no other metrical foundation than equality of the number of accents in each verse." Tennyson, as he points out, employs rhyme which was unknown to the Anglo-Saxons, but employs it as a thing of secondary value, spacing the rhymes often at immense distances. Alliteration, again, he uses, though not as the Anglo-Saxons did, on a fixed principle ; but with the increasing number of long words, each having its accent fixed, there is no such need to mark the stress, as was felt in the monosyllabic Anglo-Saxon. In a word, the metre of *Maud* is a metre which can dispense with rhyme, and may be compared to the Homeric hexameter, but is freer from fixed law. Such a metre can be handled with wonderful effect by a fine artist, and the precedent set was caught up by Mr. Swinburne, who drew from the language harmonies richer and more varied than had been heard before. Tennyson himself, after the day of *Maud*, adhered mainly to better marked rhythms ; but to the end of his life he was always capable of infinite and subtle variations of metre. His skill was never more nobly shown than in the rare music of his *Ode to Virgil*, from which may be quoted two lines applicable not unfitly to himself,

Thou that singest wheat and woodland, tilth and vineyard,
hive and horse and herd,
All the charm of all the Muses often flowering in a lonely
word.

And it is present in full measure even in the last poem of all — the *Silent Voices*, which he dictated while half articulate on his death-bed, interweaving alliteration, varying the pauses, swelling the vowel sounds, up to the solemn close ; as some skilled fencer might thrust and parry with unfailing grace and accuracy, though with flagging forces, while life ebbed from his veins.

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